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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

FOUR SCRAPS OF PAPER

Carter had the men up the steps and through the door before there was any chance for resistance

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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FOUR SCRAPS OF PAPER;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S CONEY ISLAND SEARCH.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A THREAT WITH A MOTIVE.

"Those four scraps of paper must be found, Mr. Carter."

"They will be found," the detective replied, with emphasis.

"If they are not found, and soon, there'll be another murder in the case; that's all," said Hallock.

Nick Carter and Pike Hallock were facing each other across a table at one of the moving-picture shows of Coney Island. The time was mid-afternoon of the day following the double funeral at Hallock's house, in Harway avenue, of Jethro, the fortune teller, and his sister, Cornelia Dorr, an actress.

Both had been murdered in the fortune teller's place on the Coney Island Bowery; both had been done to death while Hallock was almost within call; for, in the double capacity of lifelong friend to Jethro and fiancé to Connie Dorr, Hallock had been quite near to them at the time of the tragedy.

Hallock's occupation at the time of the affair had been that of "barker" for his friend. His duty had been to stand outside the entrance to the place, and by his wit, his loud voice, and his eloquence entice people to enter the seer's quarters, and to leave with Jethro the small stipend he charged for his services in foretelling the future.

Hallock and Jethro had been cowpunchers together since boyhood, on the ranges of Montana; they had also been prospectors and miners on occasion, and as such had discovered a vein of ore of incalculable wealth. At the time of the tragedy, the unusual occupation of the two cowpunchers of the West had been undertaken solely for the purpose of acquiring sufficient money to work their claim, and to secure possession of the immense store of wealth they had discovered among the mountains of their native State.

The possession of the secret of the mine, and of certain plans of it drawn on paper, had been, primarily, the cause of the double tragedy.

Hallock and Jethro had been the only living persons who knew of the location of the mine; but, fearing that something might happen to them which would result in the secret being entirely lost, they had drawn out a chart which gave full directions as to how the mine could be found; and this chart had been given into the possession of Cornelia Dorr, the actress, and sister to Jethro, as well as fiancée to Hallock.

Hallock had done the drawing with a fine pen, and it was made as small as possible. It had then been cut with shears into four pieces of triangular shape, all of which had been given to Connie Dorr, so that in case anything should happen to her brother and her lover, she would not be without means of finding the mine.

These four bits of paper had been concealed by her in a strange manner, and, as she supposed, in an efficacious one.

One of the pieces was carried in a gold locket, which she wore suspended from a chain around her neck.

The second piece of paper was folded and hidden beneath the emerald head of a hatpin made for the purpose; and Fate had willed that Connie Dorr should be stabbed to death by that very hatpin.

The third had been hidden in a cylindrical-shaped clasp pin that was worn in Miss Dorr's hair, beneath her hat when she was dressed for the street, but in plain view at other times.

The fourth had been concealed in a padlock-shaped pin, which she invariably wore at her throat or pinned fast to her waist.

One would suppose that such studied precautions in the hiding of the plan, divided into four parts as it was, would have been effective; but not so.

The discovery of the existence of the mine itself, then of the plan which had been made of it and the approach to it, and then the hiding places of the four separate parts of that plan, had happened. Connie Dorr had been murdered to secure possession of the four bits of paper; her brother, Jethro, had been killed because he stood in the way.

Two young women, both connected with the same theatrical company that Connie worked for, were the ones who discovered the secret. One of them was the actual murderer of Miss Dorr, and a man, a professional gambler named Ben Brigham, had assisted Blanche Gates in the commission of her crime, and in doing so had been the one to kill Jethro. The other young woman, Sallie Orme by name, had been held blameless so far as the actual commission of the two crimes was concerned.

Nick Carter, assisted by Ida Jones, had quickly traced the crimes home to the persons who were guilty; confessions had been wrung from them, and they were now in the Tombs—the great city jail of New York.

But the four scraps of paper had not been recovered.

Stolen from their separate hiding places by Blanche Gates, now in prison, at the time she stabbed her friend with the hatpin, she had, when arrested for the crime, utterly refused to say anything about them.

The Gates woman had proven quite ready to tell all about the crime itself; to admit that it had been committed only to secure possession of those four scraps of paper; to confess that she had secured possession of them and had hidden them anew. But beyond that she held herself as dumb as an oyster.

To every question that was asked of her in relation to the four scraps of paper, she replied:

"I have confessed my crime. I have even betrayed Ben Brigham, who would not confess his share in it. Do with me as you will. Execute me if you can. Send me to the electric chair, if the laws of the State of New York will sanction such an act in reference to a woman. That is perhaps your duty; but I tell you now that there is no power in the world which will force me to tell you a thing which will lead you to find the four scraps of paper—and I am the only person in the world who knows where they are."

Blanche Gates had been submitted to the so-called "third degree" at police headquarters.

She had been closely questioned by Nick Carter; by Ida Jones; by the commissioner of police; by Pike Hallock; by others. To all of them she made no satisfactory replies; to each of them she had made the same statement, in effect, as above.

She had been induced by Ida Jones to go to the house of Nick Carter that very night which followed the tragedy on the Bowery, and had there been placed under arrest; the double funeral on Harway avenue had occurred in the afternoon of the second day following. This was the day after that one; really the fourth after the crimes.

"Those four scraps of paper *must* be found!" Hallock said again, after a pause.

"And they *will* be found," the detective repeated tritely.

"There will be another murder if they're not," said Hallock.

"That is the second time you have made that remark, Pike," the detective remarked, with a slow smile. "From any other person than you, I should attribute such a remark to almost any impulse rather than to a serious one; but with you, I know that you are not given to making idle statements. Just what do you mean by that one?"

"Just what I say."

"Well, elucidate—as a schoolmaster would say to a pupil."

"I mean this, Nick: Before the State gets an opportunity to put that woman to death for the crime she has committed, I'll take the job out of the State's hands."

"Nonsense, man!"

"There isn't any nonsense about it. Not any."

"But, Hallock, why should even the suggestion of such a monstrous thing occur to you?"

Pike Hallock leaned upon the table, bringing his face closer to the detective, and in a low tone, intended to reach no other ears than Nick Carter's, he said slowly:

"As the case stands now, I am the only person alive who knows where to find that vein of virgin gold. You admit that?"

"Yes."

"Jethro and I alone possessed the secret."

"Yes."

"Jethro is dead and buried. I am alive."

"There are the four scraps of paper. They hold the secret."

"They are not living persons. The secret of the mine is drawn out on those four bits of paper. The

possession of them and careful study of them, the use of them as guides to lead a searcher to the hidden spot, would reveal the secret; but, as it stands, I am the only person alive who possesses the secret."

"How about Blanche Gates?"

"Miss Gates knows where those papers are hidden now. She probably looked at them. But she had no time to do more than glance at them to assure herself that they were what she had sought so diligently, what she had committed a crime to obtain; she had no opportunity to study them."

"Well?"

"If she should study them an hour, a week, nay, a month, I doubt, even then, if she could destroy them and still find the mine. *But if she should go out there to that country and take the four scraps of paper with her, she could find it.*"

"Well, again?"

"At least, a person who is used to that country could find the mine with the aid of those plans."

"I understand you."

"No, you do not; not quite."

"Then explain."

"Blanche Gates has not one chance in ten million of ever being free again. She is practically dead right now, so far as going in person to that mine is concerned—so far as it is likely that she will ever reap any personal profit from it."

"That is admitted."

"But Blanche Gates has got a tongue."

"Undoubtedly."

"I can read as plainly as if it were written out in black and white exactly what she intends to do with that tongue of hers in relation to the four scraps of paper."

"What?"

"She has refused to give up her secret."

"Yes."

"She will hold it till the last minute; she will tell no person her secret so long as there remains even the ghost of a chance that she may escape punishment, or find a way of escape from prison. But when that ghost of a chance is also dead, or laid, *she will tell somebody.*"

"Who?"

"We can't even guess at that. But she will have selected some person to tell her secret to, and when the time comes she will tell it. There is one thing safe to say—it will not be to you or to me that she will reveal the secret."

"No. I agree with you as to that."

"Well, I am determined that she shall not tell it at all."

"Is that what you meant by your threat a moment ago?"

"Yes; it is. She shall not tell that secret to others, even if I have to take the law into my own hands and kill her to prevent it. That is exactly what I mean."

CHAPTER II.

ALMOST A QUARREL.

As Nick Carter had said in plain words a moment before, he would not have thought much of such a threat coming from any other person than Pike Hallock; but he knew Pike Hallock to be one of those rare men who never say what they do not mean; who, silent as a rule of life, always speak to the point when words are necessary; who never threaten without absolute sincerity behind the threat.

"Pike Hallock," he said, with slow emphasis, "you are not a coward; I don't believe that any person has ever accused you of being one."

"No. If they did, it would be a lie."

"That threat of yours is the act—the words of a coward."

"What!"

Hallock started half way to his feet and then subsided upon his chair again. His face had paled. His eyes blazed.

"I repeat," said the detective coolly. "Your words are the words of a coward. Your threat is the act of a coward. If you do not retract both, you and I will part here. Our acquaintance will be at an end from this interview; and"—he spoke with slow deliberation, knowing that what he was about to say would be the only way to convey the impression he desired to give—"I shall not hesitate to proclaim you a coward throughout all New York; here at Coney Island and even among those 'old timers' in your native State of Montana."

"By Heaven, Carter, you are the first man who ever——"

"Don't indulge in heroics with me, Hallock. I mean what I say. I will do even more than I have yet said, unless you retract those words."

"Oh! You will, eh?" Hallock was mad now. His temper had flamed up to the burning point. "What else will you do?"

"I shall make use of my authority, given me by the department of police of the city of New York, and put you under arrest."

"Oh, you will, will you?"

"Yes; unless you retract. But I think you will do that."

"I'll see you——"

"Easy, Hallock. Don't say things that you will be sorry for later on."

"You'd have a sure fine time putting me under arrest, Carter."

Nick Carter shrugged his shoulders.

"I have given you threat for threat," he said. "You know that I don't say such things in an idle jest. If you persist in your threat, I shall arrest you. I'll see to it that you don't have any opportunity to do as you threaten. Just make an effort to transpose our positions for a moment. Imagine me in your place. Try to think that I would say such a fool thing as you have uttered. Imagine me, if you can, threatening the life of a *woman.*"

For the first time since the conversation had taken that turn, Hallock saw and partly appreciated the position that Nick Carter had taken; for the first time he comprehended what Nick Carter had meant to convey; he hung his head, but he made no reply.

"That touched you a little bit, Pike," said the detective, more kindly. "You did threaten a woman, did you not?"

No reply.

"Not only that, you threatened a defenseless person. Even if the person you have threatened were a man, and not a woman, the threat would still be a cowardly one, because that person is in prison, and is, therefore, defenseless. But—being both—defenseless and a woman! Good heavens, Hallock, have you lost all sense of the fitness of things?"

Pike Hallock was still silent, but his eyes no longer blazed with anger.

The lids were half lowered over them, but if Nick Carter could have seen the expression that was in their depths, he would have known that the victory was won.

He did know it, in fact, without the necessity of seeing Hallock's eyes; he had known, from the start, before the battle of words was begun, that he would win—because he knew the man.

Brave, generous to a fault, afraid of nothing, straightforward in all things, open in character and in his dealings with all mankind, Pike Hallock was the last man on earth to commit a cowardly deed.

"Listen," said the detective. "I don't blame you at all for your feelings in regard to this matter. If I were circumstanced as you are, I should feel the same way. That woman in prison not only possesses the key to the secret you cherish so jealously, but she is the murderer of the woman you loved. Forgive me for referring to these things now, but it is necessary that I should do so."

"Go on."

"Pike, if that woman were at liberty, now, guilty of the awful crime she committed; if you sought her, seeking vengeance for what she has done, you would not kill her."

"I don't know about that, Nick."

"I do. You would not do it. She is a woman."

"I know; but——"

"She's a *woman.* There is no but."

"Well, then?"

"If that same crime had been committed by a man, and you were in pursuit of that man for the same purpose I have named—if you overtook him, and found him defenseless—you would not kill him."

"I might."

"No; you would not. You'd put a gun in his hand before you made the attempt. You would give him a chance for his life. You'd kill him, of course; but you wouldn't do it until you knew that he had just as good a chance to kill you. That is the way you were brought up. That is your education. It is your birthright. You could no more go against it than you could step outside on the board walk and pick the pocket of the first man you met."

"Aw, say; what's the use——"

"You couldn't be a coward, if you tried, and I won't have you showing yourself off for one. That's all there is about it."

"Say, Nick, I sure am learning wisdom this afternoon; and then some."

"That's the way to talk, Pike. Don't forget who you are. You're Pike Hallock, cowpuncher, bull-team driver, gun fighter if you will, although you have done that on the level—but you play fair; you give the other man a chance for his alley. You're a brave man, and you couldn't be a cowardly one if you tried."

"Say, Nick."

"Well?"

"I'll take back that bunch uh words, right now."

"I knew you would."

"I'm plumb sorry I ever said them."

"I knew you would be when you thought it over."

Hallock extended one hand solemnly across the table and the detective grasped it.

"Now, let's begin all over with this discussion," he said.

"All right."

"Those four scraps of paper must be found, Nick."

"I quite agree with you. They must be found."

"You'll help me to find them?"

"I certainly will, Pike."

"No matter even if the Gates woman should give up her secret to some other person?"

"No matter if she gives it up to a thousand. We'll take after every one of them, and we will keep after them till we find the papers."

"I just want to destroy them; that's all. You know, don't you, that it isn't the value of the thing I am thinking about?"

"Yes. I understand you."

"I don't care that"—he snapped his fingers—"now for all the gold in the Rocky Mountains or elsewhere; but I don't want anybody else handling what belonged to Connie. I don't think I will ever go near the mine myself, unless it is to chase one of the robbers there. I don't want the gold that is there—now. But I don't want anybody else to have that gold, *as a consequence of Connie Dorr's death.* That is what I mean."

"I understand you."

"If I had those four scraps of paper here, right now, and could destroy them, knowing that no copy had been made, I would destroy them."

"Sure."

"And afterward, when the right time should come, I would not hesitate to reveal the location of the mine, so that others may profit by the immense wealth it contains. But, while I live, I won't ever let anybody get a dollar out of that mine as a direct result of the murder of the woman I loved. That is what I have meant to say all along."

"I know it. I understand you perfectly."

"Well, I reckon you understand me better than I do myself. The thing that I would most like to understand just now is, how are we going to get on the track of those four scraps of paper?"

"I don't know, Pike. Let's adjourn to a quieter place, where we can talk with less interruption than here—where there won't be so much to distract our attention."

"Yes. And where there won't be so many 'rooters' around. trying to hear what we are saying. Have you taken notice of that chap over at the next table, Nick?"

"Sure. He came in right after we did. I think he had been following along, for some reason."

"Following? I should say he had. He's been shadowing me for two days."

"Eh? Is that so? Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Oh, I didn't think it worth telling. I'm quite able to take care of myself."

"Granted. All the same, it is well to take me into your confidence about such things. Do you know who he is?"

"No."

"Did you never see him before these two days you have mentioned?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"I rather wonder that you have let him follow you about without raising an objection to his presence."

Hallock smiled grimly.

"Well, you see, Nick, I have never been quite sure that he was actually following me. I have thought that his presence near me might have been a mere happen so. Then, again, he has been sort uh company."

"Well, come along. We can soon determine if he is following. It won't take long to do that."

"No; I reckon not. But say, Nick."

"Well?"

"I had another idea about him, too."

"What was that, Pike?"

"Well, I thought that maybe it would be a good idea to let him chase along after me without his suspecting that I was onto his game. I have always pretended that I didn't see him at all and wasn't 'on' a little bit to what he was doing. I thought, in that way, that he might hang himself if I gave him rope enough."

"Not a bad idea; only I want to be sure that he is following."

"So do I."

"Come along. It won't take us long to be certain about it."

"You bet your life it won't."

CHAPTER III.

THE FAKE SHADOWER.

The two left the inclosure where the moving pictures were exhibited and strolled together along that now famous thoroughfare—if it can be called a thoroughfare—the Coney Island Bowery.

Of late years that remarkable place has earned almost as great and as questionable a reputation as that formerly possessed by the old Bowery in the City of New York.

Nick and his companion presently turned into one of the narrow lanes between the buildings and followed it through to Surf Avenue, which is now like a city

street. There they turned eastward—and presently, when they were about to make a second turn which would take them to the bridge over Coney Island Creek and thence upon Harway Avenue, Nick paused and looked back quickly—just in time to see the man dodge into a convenient doorway.

For a moment Nick was in doubt whether to return and accost the man or not.

He decided, however, that it was as well not to do so at present, and with a word to Hallock they continued on their way.

It was rather more than half the distance between the island and Ulmer Park to the house which was their destination, and where Jethro and Hallock had lived together while the fortune-telling business was in operation. They covered it slowly, not once looking back, although twice the detective pulled a small mirror from his pocket and held it so that he was enabled to see behind him without turning his head.

Those glances into the mirror were sufficient to convince him that the "shadow" was still on the trail, and that was all he desired.

Knowing that the man was there, and that he was following, it was certain that he had a well-defined purpose in doing so; it was also certain that there could be but one purpose, and that must, perforce, relate to the secret of the mine and to the four scraps of paper now concealed in some unknown place.

Nick was determined that before the day was much older he would have a talk with that "shadow," believing that some information of a sort could be gotten out of him.

They arrived at the house and entered it without glancing behind them; but the moment they were inside the door and it was closed behind them, Nick said rapidly:

"I am going out the back way, Pike. Stay here and show yourself two or three times at one of the front windows. When you do so, conduct yourself as if you were engaged in conversation with another person in the room with you. I will do the rest."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll show you in a little while. Stand ready to admit me at the front door when I return. I won't look just the same, but I'll make this sign from the street."

He took his handkerchief from his pocket, and, after wiping the inside of his hat with it, drew it three times through his left hand, and then returned it to his pocket.

Then he hastened to the rear of the house, and paused for a moment inside the closed back porch. Then he made a few rapid changes in his appearance.

These amounted to very little, and would not have sufficed for a thorough disguise; but for the purposes of his present occupation were entirely adequate.

He merely pulled a wig of gray hair over his head, fastened on a beard and mustache of the same sort, and then stepped outside. He hadn't much faith in the ability of the man who had followed them, and believed that he could easily get within speaking distance of the fellow before he was recognized, and that was all he wished to do.

Nick hurried forward, a short distance toward the beech of Gravesend Bay. Then he leaped the fence into the next yard, passed around that house and among some boats that had been drawn upon the shore there, and thence walked swiftly toward the avenue again.

He came out upon it a short distance above the house where Hallock was waiting for him, and he crossed directly to the opposite side of the street—and toward the man who had been shadowing him and Hallock, and who was now seated upon the curbing of the street, nearly opposite Hallock's house, watching it.

"He is about the weakest shadow I ever saw," was Nick's mental comment as he approached the man. "He doesn't know the first rudiments of the game. If he is a specimen of what is to be contended with in this affair, there won't be much doing."

But, although Nick did not then realize it, those against whom he had to contend, were a great deal shrewder than he imagined, and had carried out a set purpose in putting this particular man where he was. He was soon to make a very correct guess about it, however.

Without the least suspicion on the part of the "shadow," Nick drew near to him, stopped suddenly; and, in his natural tones, said sharply:

"That house over there seems to interest you, my friend."

"What house?" asked the man blankly; or in a voice and with an expression which he intended should be utterly blank.

"That one; where Mr. Pike Hallock lives."

"I don't know which house you mean," said the man, with some evidence of uneasiness.

"Don't you? Well, I'll show you. Come along."

Nick seized the man by the arm and drew him to his feet. Then, before the fellow could make an effort to offer any resistance, Nick began hurrying him across the avenue toward the house in question.

When they reached the middle of the street the fellow exerted himself, and stopped.

"What in thunder are you doing?" he demanded.

"Don't you see what I'm doing?" asked Nick, releasing his hold for an instant, withdrawing his handkerchief from his pocket, and then making use of it first to wipe the inside of his hat and then to draw it through his left hand.

The man seized the opportunity to back several feet away from the detective; but the moment Nick completed the handkerchief gesture, he leaped forward quickly and grasped the fellow by the arm a second time.

This time the "shadow" tried to pull himself away; but Nick held on tightly, so tightly, in fact, that the man uttered an involuntary exclamation of pain, and cried out:

"Quit that! You're hurting me."

"I meant to hurt you," was the quiet response.

"Well, you let go of me or I'll know the reason why,"

"I'm not going to let go of you, as you express it," said Nick grimly. "I'm going to take you with me into that house that seems to interest you so much. Be careful, now, or I'll hurt you again. If you make any more resistance, or refuse to accompany me into that house, I'll hand you one that'll make you see more stars than you ever did before—and afterward I'll carry you into it. Understand that?"

The man tried to jerk himself free, but Nick shut down so tightly on the arm that another cry of pain was the result of it. Then the fellow would have called aloud for help, but the detective drew back his right arm, warningly.

"Remember what I said to you, just now," he said. "Will you go with me quietly, or——"

The pause was significant.

The man did not reply, nor did the detective hesitate. He yanked his man forward with sudden vehemence which carried him to the pavement before he knew what had happened. Then the front door of the house opened, and Nick had the man up the steps and through the now open doorway before there was any more chance for resistance.

Then, while Hallock closed and fastened the door again, Nick whirled his man through the hall and into the room at the rear of it—that room which is usually designated by the term back parlor. There he put the fellow into a deep chair, and stood over him. Hallock remained a short distance away, looking on with a quiet smile.

"Now, give up," said Nick tersely.

"Give up what?" asked the man doggedly.

"All you know. It won't take long. You haven't very much on your mind."

"I don't know what you're talking about; neither do you."

"I'm talking about you. I want to know why you have been chasing after Mr. Hallock for two days or more."

"I haven't."

"That is a deliberate lie. If you do not tell the truth, I will find a method to force you to do so. Do you know who I am?"

"No; I don't, and I don't want to."

"Well, you needn't know—at present. It is not necessary that you should. Hallock, have you got a piece of rope in the house?"

"Sure. What do you want of it?" asked Hallock, who presumed that Nick was only trying to frighten the man into talking.

"I'm going to string him up and let him hang until he gets ready to talk. It won't take very long. Chaps like him haven't much staying qualities when they have a rope around their necks. He's a fine specimen for a 'shadow,' isn't he?"

"I'll get the rope," said Hallock.

He turned about, as if he intended to do so, but the man interrupted him.

"Don't! Please don't!" he half shouted. "I'll talk."

"That is sensible," said the detective. "If you talk, and tell all you know that we want to hear told, we won't keep you long, and when we are through with you, you won't be any the worse off for your experience in this house. But if you won't talk—look out."

"Oh, I'll talk—now."

"That's better."

"What do you want to know?"

"Why have you been following Mr. Hallock?"

"Because I was told to follow him."

"Who hired you to do that?"

"A man."

"What man?"

"I don't know his name or anything about him."

"What were you told to do, besides follow Mr. Hallock?"

"Nothing—only just report where he went, who he saw and talked with, and all that."

"To whom were you to report?"

"To the man."

"What man?"

"The one that hired me."

"How were you to report to him if you didn't know who he was or where to find him?"

"Oh, he said he'd find me when he wanted to find out what I knew; and he has—twice."

"So you have already reported to him twice, have you?"

"Yes."

"When did you make your reports, and where?"

"I made one yesterday; the other was late in the evening of the day before. Both times the man to whom I made the reports met me on the Bowery at the island."

"What did you tell him when you made those reports?"

"I just answered his questions. He asked me where Mr. Hallock had gone, what he had done, who he had seen and talked with, and such things as that. It looked to me like an easy job."

"So it was. You can go, now; but you had best look for another job. You are what is called a sparrow in this business. Show him to the front door, Hallock, and kick him out of it. He is of no use to us, and his usefulness is over and past in the other place. He was merely a foil that was used by a real 'shadower' to distract attention from himself. They are playing a cleverer game than I supposed."

CHAPTER IV.

HALLOCK FINDS THAT HE IS HUNTED.

"Say, Nick," said Hallock, as soon as he returned from the front door, where he had carried out, literally, the directions given him by the detective in regard to putting the man out of the house, "will you tell me why you didn't try to get any further information out of that fellow?"

"Because he didn't have it to give."

"How do you know he didn't?"

"By the very character of his employment."

"At least he must have known the description of the man who engaged him."

"Oh, no, he didn't. Or, if he did, it wouldn't have benefited us any to have it."

"Why not?"

"Because this fellow was what is called a 'sparrow.'"

"Humph! What is a sparrow, in that sense?"

"A distractor of attention; nothing more."

"I'm afraid you're too deep for me. I don't in the least understand you."

"There has been a real shadow after you, Pike; this fellow was only a fake. He was put on your trail purposely to have him discovered, if you were smart enough to see anybody who was trying that game. But at the same time this fellow was at work, another one, or possibly two, were doing the real work. You did not see either of them for two reasons: Because they are probably expert at the business, and because your attention was distracted from them by the presence of the 'sparrow.'"

"I see. Then there are others, eh?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Why do you suppose they are having me shadowed? And, what is still more important, who are the persons you have referred to as 'they'?"

"I can reply to the first question; but the second one must remain unanswered, for the present."

"Well, the first one, then."

"You are being shadowed for two reasons. One of them is that you are the only person now alive who knows how to find the lost mine—we will speak of it in that way."

"Yes; what's the other reason?"

"I presume somebody has sized up the situation about like this: If anything at all is known to them about the four scraps of paper, it is thought that they are in your possession; or, at least, that you know where they are, and are only biding your time to secure possession of them. You will remember that the plan of the mine, as being the real incentive to the two crimes that were committed, was pretty well exploited in the daily papers."

"Yes."

"Well, for that very reason every crook in New York is aware of the fact that the secret of the mine is a valuable asset, and that you are the only person who possesses it. Onto that much, Pike?"

"Yes."

"Now, in addition to the crooks, there is another class of persons to whom we will refer as 'near-crooks.' By that term I mean a lot of individuals who have refrained from becoming real crooks only through lack of opportunity. They have read the papers, too."

"Well?"

"There is a third class—and, as a class, about as unprincipled as any I have already mentioned."

"And they are——"

"A lot of persons who hang around New York, who call themselves mining promoters. They have read the papers also, and they have smacked their lips over the bit of luscious fruit which the reading about the

mine provided for them. They would be on the lookout for you, too. I shouldn't wonder if you would be approached by one of that class before long with a proposition to let him handle the affair for you. If such a thing should happen, let me know about it at once."

"I will."

"Then, again, there are undoubtedly certain acquaintances of the Gates woman, to whom she has made boasts about the fortune that was waiting somewhere for her, and that she had only to reach out a hand and take it whenever she was ready to do so."

"Gee! There are a lot of them; eh?"

"There are also Brigham's friends among the gambling fraternity. Now, there are two distinct classes which belong to the gambler's class."

"I never found but one class; maybe you have."

"Nevertheless there are two. One is rather rare. He is called the square gambler. He is more or less a myth, and yet, judged from his own standpoint, he does exist. But the crooked gambler—and that is the class to which Brigham belongs—is an out-and-out thief. There is no other word to apply to him. His name is legion in New York. He sizes up the condition of your pocket and plays you for your roll, but he takes good care that you never have a bit of show to win. John Quinn, the reformed gambler, has proved that to hundreds of thousands here and abroad. Those fellows have read the papers, too. Besides, they know Brigham. They are satisfied that he would not have got himself into all that trouble unless there was a very big stake in sight. Perhaps he has talked just enough to make them the more positive about it."

"Well?"

"They are after you, too."

"Look here, Nick, it begins to look as if all New York had camped on my trail."

"That is about the size of it, Pike."

"And you don't know which one of the outfits to attribute this particular move to?"

"No, I don't."

"But why are they all after me?"

"Because they think you know where the four scraps of paper are hidden away. That is one reason, but the other one is even stronger."

"What is that?"

"Because you don't need the four scraps of paper to find the mine. You possess the knowledge, in your brain, how to find the place."

"That is no dream."

"Well, if the scraps of paper are not forthcoming after a time, then you'll be trailed until you start for that mine. Then you'll be followed."

"I'll never start for it. I never want to see it again."

"You think so now, but you will go to that mine before you are a year older, I haven't a doubt."

"We needn't argue that point, anyhow."

"No."

"But about the scraps of paper. It was all told in the yellow sheets that the Gates woman had hidden them away, and that she won't give up the knowledge about them. Those fellows you have named must know all that as well as we do."

"They know, of course, that it was so stated in the papers; they know it has been given out that she will not tell where the scraps of paper are hidden; but they don't believe a word of it. They think it is a 'stall.' They call it a dodge of yours, or mine."

"Oh, I see."

"And that brings to mind that there are still two classes of individuals who would be interested in watching you, in knowing what you are doing, in knowing just what success you are having in the search for the scraps of paper. These two classes understand that you do not now know where they are concealed."

"More and more, more and more, still there's more to follow," sang Hallock, with a grim smile. "The thing is sure getting interesting. Go on. Who are they?"

"Pike, there are several thousand men on the police force in New York. Wherever you get that number of men together, there are sure to be some black sheep."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Well, it is not unlikely that a policeman here and there, interested in the case personally or not, has still had his cupidity aroused by the story of the mine and the four scraps of paper which will supply the key to find it. They would be interested to keep posted as to your motives; not criminally, perhaps, but interested, nevertheless."

"Uh huh. I have thought of that. Two of them have already asked me a lot of rather leading questions about it."

"Sure."

"Now, what is the other outfit? Gee! I hope it is the last one there is in the bunch."

"I think it is the last that we can describe as a distinct class in this matter, and hardly a class at that: one or two, possibly three, individuals."

"Well?"

"Some person or persons to whom the Gates woman has found an opportunity to make a proposal, since her imprisonment."

"Again I don't understand you."

"Well, if you were an old acquaintance or friend of hers, and should find an opportunity to question her about the four scraps of paper, she might say, in effect, just the thing that you suggested in our talk while we were in the moving-picture place, over at the island."

"Eh?"

"She might say to you, if you asked her about it as an old friend, that when she found out that all hope was at an end, she'd give up the knowledge; or—and here is the point on which I had already decided to work, and the one that is really worth our attention—she would say to her lawyer, in effect, that if he would get her free, she would share the secret with him."

"Gee! Nick, but that sounds reasonable."

"It is reasonable. It is more than reasonable. Her lawyer is the only person who has uninterrupted opportunity to consult with her; to converse with her; to be with her in confidential talk without exciting the least suspicion as to motive."

"That's right."

"Now, if she has made any such proposition to him as I have suggested—that she will give him the secret, or will share it with him, on condition that he gets her free—well, you see the point?"

"No; I can't say that I do."

"That lawyer—I know him, and I'll tell you more about him, presently—is as shrewd as they make 'em. He knows that there is no more chance of doing anything for her than nothing at all. She is as good as dead, so far as that mine is concerned, and I'd be willing to bet a hundred to one in any amount, if there were any method of proving it, that Conniston—Jacob Conniston is the name—has made up his mind to find those four scraps of paper before any other person can do it. Or, failing in finding the scraps of paper, that he will discover a way to get the needed information out of you."

"Uh huh," said Hallock, nodding his head with emphasis.

"He knows that you will search high and low for the scraps of paper; he knows that you will secure my services to assist you in finding them; he thinks that by watching you, he will get more or less of an idea of what I am doing in the matter—and he has reason to believe that I will be thorough in my search if I undertake it."

"Then he seems to be the only man in this game that is worth wasting our powder on; eh?"

"I'm not so sure of that. There are others. But Jake Conniston is the most active opponent we have in the field just now—and the most formidable one, too, for he has unlimited opportunities to worm the secret out of his client—which we have not got."

CHAPTER V.

THE FOUR SCRAPS OF PAPER.

There was a few moments of silence after that, and then the detective said:

"Now, Pike, we will drop the present phase of the subject, if you please. There is one other point that I wish to touch upon before I return to the city—and I must go very soon."

"All right, Nick. What is it?"

"Let us spend a few minutes in trying to see if we can't figure out something that will assist us in the actual search for the scraps of paper."

"I don't see how I am to be of any assistance to you in that line, Nick. It is more in yours than in mine."

"Granted; but two heads are always better than one."

"Uh huh. I have heard that said before now."

"I shall go over, as shortly and briefly as possible, the few facts of the tragedy which have reference directly to the present hiding place of the scraps of paper."

"Well?"

"When the Gates woman entered the room where she committed the crime to secure those bits of paper, she knew exactly where they were then hidden."

"She did."

"Now, let us see how she secured them."

"It's a gruesome subject, Nick."

"I will touch upon it very briefly, and very lightly: but I want you to help me."

"All right."

"Miss Dorr's hat was already on the table in front of her; or, at least, so we all decided was the case."

"Yes."

"One of the hiding places was in a pin, fastened in her hair. The fact that she did not wear her hat left it exposed."

"Yes."

"The other hiding places were, respectively: In the

lock-shaped pin at her throat; in the locket that hung by a chain around her neck; and in, or, rather, beneath the head of the hatpin that was used in committing the crime. Now, the Gates woman had only a short interval in which to secure possession of those papers. Brigham probably followed her into that room, although he has denied it."

"But he did do it."

"I think so. Now, we know that she removed her own pin that she wore at her neck, and put it in the place of Miss Dorr's—one of the hiding places. She stole the locket by lifting the chain, that held it, over the head of her victim. She unclasped the pin from Miss Dorr's hair, and concealed that somewhere about her; and then she had to unscrew the head of the emerald-headed hatpin, remove the scrap of paper from it, and return the head of the pin to its place. All of that took time."

"Yes."

"Now, she had one of the scraps of paper bare in her grasp; the others were in the receptacles where they had been hidden, which, we will say, she dropped inside of her small handbag."

"Doubtless."

"Now, we come to the point I am getting at. The scraps of paper for which she had committed her great crime—for which Brigham had killed Jethro—were in her possession, and the man Brigham had been with her all the time. But already that woman had decided that Brigham should not have those scraps of paper, while he was equally determined that he *would* possess himself of them. There isn't any doubt in my mind that both those murderers were determined from the very inception of the affair that the other one should not profit by it."

"I see."

"We know, positively, that Brigham does not know where the papers are now."

"If we are right about it—yes. I have wondered sometimes if we were not fooled in that respect."

"No; we have not been fooled in that respect. She knows where the papers are, and he does not—and he never has known since the moment they fell into her possession as the fruit of the crime."

"Well, what of it, so long as we do not know where they are?"

"Let us ask ourselves what opportunity she had to hide them without the knowledge of the man with her, after they left Jethro's place."

"Well?"

"They had both committed crimes. Both were more or less excited; but all the time the mind of each was riveted upon the thing for which they had sinned. There is no doubt of that."

"No."

"One of the bits of paper was inside a gold lock which fastened with a key. The key was not in the Gates woman's possession; therefore she could not get at that paper. One of the papers was loose in her hand when she left that room; the remaining two were in their respective hiding places, namely, the locket and the clasp pin for the hair."

"Yes."

"The locket opened with an ordinary catch. By slipping her hand into her bag, while she was beside Brigham, she could spring that catch open and remove the paper inside, leaving it loose in her bag. Also she could unscrew the plug at the end of the clasp pin for the hair, and dispose of it in the same manner. But we must not forget one thing."

"What is that?"

"Brigham's curiosity."

"What has that to do with it?"

"The plan of a method to find a fortune is an interesting thing. It was all the more interesting to that man at that moment because of the fact that he had committed a murder to secure it. He would lose very little time in demanding to see those papers. He would wish to be assured that the crime had not been for nothing."

"Uh huh."

"She couldn't put him off very long. He would be too insistent for that."

"Well?"

"And if she retained them in her possession, she would simply be compelled to show them to the man."

"I think so, too."

"He would simply force her to do it. Therefore, she had to rid herself of them without his knowledge."

"Now you are getting beyond me."

"She had not a moment away from him. You may be assured that he would not leave her for one moment alone, until he had seen those bits of paper, or until he had at least one or two of them in his possession. With one or two of them in his own possession, he was safe, for as I understand your arrangement of that plan, before it was cut into four pieces, any one is valueless without the remaining three, two would be valueless without the other two, and—would three of them be equally valueless without the remaining one?"

"Yes. It would be necessary. You could not find

the mine with any three of them; the fourth one would be necessary. That is the way I made that plan."

"Well, then we must determine that she did just as any shrewd person would do under the same circumstances."

"I don't consider myself to be a shrewd person, and, therefore, I don't know what you mean by that statement."

"Put yourself in her place."

"I can't. I wouldn't if I could."

"Probably not. Let us say that she had already worked the paper out of the locket and out of the clasp pin. The other, in the breast pin, was locked in, so that she could not get it out without the key, or in default of that, without breaking the lock. But she could palm the other three scraps of paper, now loose in her hand, inside the bag."

"Well?"

"If I were in her place at that time, I should have given the breast pin, that locked with a key, into his hand. I should have said, 'One of the papers is inside of that pin. See if you can open it.' He wouldn't have lost any time in trying."

"What of that?"

"He would doubtless succeed, too. But it would occupy a little time for him to do so, and while he was so occupied, his whole attention would be riveted upon what he was doing, to the entire exclusion of everything else."

"Right."

"Now, she has—if we adopt the present tense for a moment—a very short time in which to dispose of three of the scraps of paper so that he cannot find them, and what is still more important, so that he cannot take them from her by force when she refuses to give them up."

"Uh huh. I see what you are getting at."

"Was that padlock pin very strong? Could it be pried open with a good knife?"

"Yes; if the blade were strong enough."

"Well, picture him as trying to pry that lock open. Picture her as leaning over him, half upon him in the seat where they were, wherever it was, and reaching down with her right hand, all the time, unseen by him, toward one of her low shoes. Can't you see her tucking the remaining three scraps of paper inside that shoe—that low shoe? And doing it without his once suspecting that she is playing a game? Wrapped in his own occupation, with the woman leaning over him, he would not even know that she reached downward toward her feet. He would be momentarily oblivious of everything save his absorbing occupation."

"This is a little far-fetched, isn't it, Nick, all this study of what they did while seated upon some veranda, or in the train that took them home?"

"I am only trying to determine where we ought to look for the scraps of paper first,"

"Well?"

"I hope it did happen on the train, for then Miss Sallie Orme would have been with them, and, even though she occupied a different seat, must have seen some of the by-play."

"Go on."

"When the lock was broken one of the scraps of paper would be exposed. Both would spend a moment or two in examination of it. Then Brigham would demand the other scraps to match with that one."

"And then——"

"Why, then she would laugh at him and calmly tell him that she hadn't them; that she had already disposed of them in a safe hiding place where they would remain until she chose to exhibit them. It doesn't matter what sort of explanation she would make of what she had done, the fact would remain that she had disposed of them so that he could not find them. He would not remember that she had reached downward to her shoe; she would succeed in convincing him that she had concealed them elsewhere than on her person, and she would puzzle him so that he would be easily cajoled into surrendering the fourth scrap of paper to her, on her promise that when they arrived in New York, or on the morrow at latest, he should examine all of them. But the point is that she had succeeded in placing these three scraps of paper where she could not touch them herself until she arrived in one of two places—her dressing room at the theatre, or at her own room where she lived. Now, Pike, where did she finally hide all four of them?"

CHAPTER VI.

A MURDERER'S STORY.

It was an unanswerable question just then, and Nick Carter did not press the point.

A few minutes later he parted with Hallock and returned to the city; and there he went at once to the Tombs, and through the warden secured an immediate interview with the gambler, Brigham.

Brigham had been questioned before about the

papers, but beyond insisting that he knew nothing about them, had been uncommunicative; sullenly so.

The gambler was sore, and Nick knew it.

The detective did not expect to obtain any stated information at this interview he had sought, but he believed that Brigham could tell him something about that afternoon of the murder which would materially assist in the search for the scraps of paper, if only the man did not suspect that the papers themselves were the object of inquiry.

Nick was convinced that the man believed that the Gates woman would give up her secret to somebody, sooner or later. Even though he was in prison, and charged with a crime which must send him to the electric chair, there was still the stimulating thought of the incalculable wealth of gold deposit to which those lost scraps of paper were the key.

The detective had the man brought to the consultation room.

"Well, Brigham," he said, when the man stood before him, frowning sullenly, "I don't suppose I need to tell you who I am? I guess you remember me, all right."

"You bet I do. What do you want with me? You're not my lawyer. You haven't any right to have me brought into this room. That is the privilege of a lawyer."

"It is one that I have exercised, nevertheless," said the detective.

"What do you want with me? Eh? Want to question me about those plans, do you?"

"No. I am not going to question you about the scraps of paper. It isn't necessary."

"'Tain't, eh? Why not? Think you've found them?" was the leering inquiry.

"I don't care to talk about them at all, at the present time, more than to assure you that Mr. Hallock is perfectly able to find the lost mine whenever he has the desire to do so. The plan of it as drawn on the paper that was divided into four parts was made entirely for the use of Miss Dorr, in case anything should happen to him and to her brother. Now, the brother is dead, and so is the lady. Of what use are the scraps of paper to Hallock?"

"You might like to have them yourself."

"I? Not at all. Hallock will take me to the mine whenever I desire to go there."

"Then you're a fool if you don't go at once. If what I hear about that little piece of property is true, it must be a great place. It was great enough to get me into this fix, anyhow."

"That is what I wanted to ask you about, Brigham: How did you get into this business?"

"Why, you know that, Carter."

"No. I know only the salient point about it. I know that the two actresses, Miss Gates and Miss Orme, learned about the mine through their talks with Miss Dorr and with Jethro, her brother; also with Hallock. I suppose, since you were more or less friendly with Miss Gates, that she let you into the secret: but the rest of it, and how it all really came about, I know nothing of."

"Do you really wish to hear about all that?" asked Brigham.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Call it idle curiosity, if you like."

"I couldn't do that, Carter. You are not one to harbor idle curiosity about anything."

"Well, I would like to hear about it, just the same."

"And, strangely enough, I don't mind telling you. It isn't of any particular account, anyhow. There is nothing about it that could be used against either of us, and as Blanche has confessed and I am about as good as found guilty, what does it matter?"

"Exactly. What does it matter?"

"Well, in the first place, I'll tell you a little secret that hasn't got out yet, although I have no reason for keeping it. Blanche Gates is my wife. She is really Mrs. Brigham, although like all actresses she prefers to be known as miss. Once she had an idea that she could capture Jethro; that he would propose to her, and she approached me on the subject of a divorce so that she could marry him in that case."

"Oho! I see."

"Yes. Well, I wouldn't hear of it. It was out of the question. At first I thought she was stuck on the fellow, but I wasn't long in finding out that it was something else than love that attracted her."

"Then is when you heard about the rich mine, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"This is quite interesting."

"Well, when she told me about that, and all she had heard about it, it struck me as being a good game to play, for both of us, and so I proposed that she marry him, anyway, and divide up after we had secured his gold and him, too. But she wouldn't hear of that. She was smart enough to see that I would have her on the hip for bigamy, and she understood me well enough to know that I'd probably make use of my power."

"Which you would have done, without compunction."

"Sure. What do you take me for? Well, I had heard enough about the gold, by that time, to want to know a lot more. I began asking questions. Two and two added together generally results in four. Little by little the thing grew. I heard more and more about that mine, and finally about the plan of it, and its being divided into four parts, which were hidden away somewhere so that nobody but Connie Dorr knew how to get at them."

"And then——"

"Then, my dear Carter, Sallie Orme got the secret out of the nigger—out of Connie Dorr's maid, Eliza. She thought those scraps of paper were charms against hoodoos."

"I know all about that."

"Well, we didn't say a word about what we intended to do, not even to Sallie, but we made up our mind that we'd get hold of those scraps of paper, somehow. I tried it in two or three different ways at the dressing room at the theatre, but that nigger was on her guard, and she watched over the supposed hoodoo charms a good deal better than she would have cared for them had she known what they really were. Then Blanche suggested that we could get them at Coney Island, some day, when Connie went down there to see her brother. She had been inside Jethro's place several times, and knew all about it. Her plan was that we should get in at the rear door—she managed to get an impression of the key to that lock—and that I should bat Jethro over the head with a blackjack.

"Blanche was to disguise herself with a domino; I, with anything at hand. We were to enter at the rear door and then make a noise which would call Jethro into that room. Well, the day came when we were to carry out the thing; when Connie was going to the island to see her brother.

"She asked Blanche to go; she asked Sallie, too. I was told of it, and went down in the morning, ahead of them. In strolling through the Bowery down there, I came upon a chap who was selling those gun silencers. You know."

"Yes."

"I bought one that fitted the muzzle of my gun. Then, at the appointed time, I went to meet my wife and Sallie, after they were to part with Connie long enough for her to go to see her brother. Well, we left Sallie to take care of herself, and we slipped around to the rear of Jethro's place, and I'll give you my word that it was not until we had used the key and were actually inside that rear room that we discovered that she had forgotten the domino and I had neglected to bring the blackjack. You can tell by that how rattled we were. You can take my word for another thing, too."

"What is that?"

"We would have slipped out of the place and have gone away, and probably those two crimes would never have been committed at all, if it had not been for the fact that just at the very instant we were about to turn away, the door between the two rooms opened, and Jethro came in upon us."

"Did he see you? Did he discover that you were there?"

"No. Fortunately for us, he did not."

"What happened then? Tell me about it."

"He walked to the hook where his red robe—the one he used in his fortune-telling stunt—was hanging. He took it down and turned back toward the door of the consulting room. But my wife had to sneeze at that instant. I knew it was all up, then. Jethro turned his head, but, before he could turn his body around toward us, I pulled the gun on him."

"What happened after that, Brigham?"

"I think I was half paralyzed by what I had done. I fired twice, but I think the first bullet killed Jethro. Anyhow, he dropped as if it had. Blanche jumped past me and was at the door of the other room, and past it, before I could say my own name, if I had tried. She grabbed up the robe Jethro had dropped, as she went past his body on the floor. I saw her throw it over her as she would have done with a domino."

"And then?"

"I can't tell you just what happened during the next eight or ten seconds, for I don't know. But as soon as I recovered myself so that I could move, I pushed the curtains aside—Blanche had left the door ajar—and saw Blanche working around the chair in which Connie Dorr was seated. Even then I didn't size up the situation. I think I must have been in a sort of daze. I said something to Blanche, in a low tone—I don't remember what it was—and she told me to shut up. It didn't occur to me that Connie Dorr was dead. I thought I heard a noise behind me, and turned back toward the body of Jethro, on the floor; and I was standing there looking down upon it when my wife came out and joined me.

"She went straight to the hook from which Jethro had taken the robe, and she put it back where it be-

longed. Then she made for the rear door and I followed her. And so we left the place together. I don't believe that we were in it more than ten minutes, all told."

"And you didn't go inside the consulting room, at all?"

"No. No farther than I have told you."

"When you left the place together, after the things you have described, what did you do?"

"We walked through between two buildings, to the Bowery. Then we turned along it as far as Henderson's, and then we went through another alley to Surf Avenue."

"Well? And then?"

"A car was just coming to a stop directly in front of us. We crossed the avenue hurriedly and climbed aboard of it. I was too rattled to know much about what we were doing; so rattled that when the conductor came along, Blanche had to nudge me to make me pay the fare. We rode in silence as far as Seagate, where the cars stop, but we didn't get out. We remained in the car and rode back up the avenue in it. I didn't know, even then, that Connie Dorr was dead. That is, I hadn't thought about it. I really didn't know it.

"On the way back I remembered what we had gone there to get, and I asked Blanche about the plan of the mine. She had been fumbling in her handbag—just like those women carry as a rule, you know—and when I asked her about the plan of the mine, she drew her hand out and opened it under my eyes. It held Connie's locket, and a pin that I had seen her wear in her hair. Blanche wrapped the two things in her handkerchief and gave them to me.

"'Hide that away,' she said to me. 'The locket and pin contain two of the parts of the plan; I have got the others. We'll match them together, to-night, after the theatre.'

"I put them in the inside pocket of my vest. We got off at the elevated railroad station, and met Sallie. I put the two of them on a train, and left them. Then I rushed to get a drink, and instead of taking one, I took about thirty."

CHAPTER VII.

GETTING ON THE TRAIL.

"So you got drunk?" said the detective, keeping Brigham to his subject, and realizing that they had now reached the point where there was something to be learned.

"No; that is the funny part of it—I didn't. I drank a lot of the stuff, but I was under such excitement as a result of what had happened that it didn't seem to affect me at all. I tried to get full, and couldn't. And that's a fact."

"What next?"

"I stayed there at the island. You may believe it or not, but I was drawn to the vicinity of Jethro's place like a magnet draws a needle. I couldn't pull myself away from it."

"What about the things in your pocket, that your wife gave you?"

"Oh, I knew they were there, but all the same I half forgot about them. I was only looking for one thing, then."

"What was that?"

"For a tumult near Jethro's place, when his body should be discovered. I thought it very strange that there wasn't excitement there, when I first went near it after—afterward."

"Yes. Well?"

"Finally I went up close to it. Then I saw that Hallock, the 'barker,' wasn't in his place, and things seemed to be closed up. Then I saw some cops coming, and you were with them. I sneaked back into a place where I was hidden from view, and I stayed around there until I heard what had happened. I couldn't get away, somehow."

"I understand."

"Then the news was given out that *two* people had been murdered—a man and a woman; the fortune teller and a woman client that was with him, so they said. It was supposed at first that Jethro had killed the woman, *but I knew!*"

"Of course."

"That was the first time it struck me that Connie Dorr was dead when I looked into the room at the time that Blanche was standing over her. I knew then that Blanche had killed her. I beat it, then, for fair. I didn't lose any time in leaving the island and making for New York."

"And the things you had in your pocket? What about them?"

"I forgot all about them till I got to New York. I had kept loading in the booze and it had begun to have its effect. By the time I got to my room I was pretty woozy."

"Yes."

"Well, I pulled the things out of my pocket. I took the handkerchief off them. I opened the locket. *It was empty!*"

"Do you mean that the part of the plan, drawn on one of the scraps of paper, was not there, where your wife had told you it would be found?"

"Sure that is what I mean. The locket was empty. So was the hollow in the clasp pin that Connie Dorr had worn in her hair. There wasn't a thing in either of them."

"I see. Well?"

"My first thought was that Blanche had made a mistake; that she had been fooled—and then I tumbled."

"What do you mean?"

"I remembered that while we were riding in the car to Seagate and back again, after we came out of Jethro's place, Blanche had been fumbling inside her handbag all the time, and I tumbled to the fact that she had been engaged in removing those scraps of paper from the locket and the pin all the time, and that she had only given the jewelry to me *after* she had taken out the scraps of paper. Instead of keeping two of them and giving me two, as she had pretended to do, she had kept all four of them."

"What do you think of that?"

"I was mad; I was also drunk by that time; don't forget that."

"No."

"I dropped the locket and the pin into one of my pockets and made for the theatre, where Blanche was playing. I brushed past the doorman at the stage entrance and went straight to Blanche's room, and I pushed open the door and entered it before any one attempted to stop me. Blanche was in her dressing room, and alone."

"Well?"

"I pulled the things out of my pocket and threw them into her lap.

"'You thief!' I yelled at her. To me it seemed as though that part of her crime was worse than the other thing she had done. Then I charged her with taking the things out of the locket and the pin, and I don't know what else would have happened if we had not been interrupted at that moment."

"What did happen?"

"Blanche jumped to her feet, scared to death, almost. She hid the locket and pin just as the door opened and the stage manager came into the dressing room. He didn't know that I was Blanche's husband. He didn't like my being there. He thought that her evident rattled condition was due to the fact that I had forced my way into the room, for he had heard about it from the doorman; also that I was drunk. They weren't long in hustling me out of that place, I can tell you; and I went, without another word."

"Naturally."

"And Blanche stood and looked on, too, without saying a word—but she had managed to hide the locket and the pin, so that nobody saw them. I was glad that I was well rid of them, anyhow. That is the whole story, and I'm glad I have told it to you."

"I don't suppose you saw your wife again that night—that is, until you saw her at my house after you were both arrested?"

"No; and you know the condition I was in by that time."

"Yes. Now, Brigham, have you engaged a lawyer?"

"I've got one—Jake Conniston. He is Blanche's lawyer, and he came to me and volunteered his services. Said that Blanche sent him."

"Do you think she *did* send him to you?"

"No. She doesn't care a hang what becomes of me. Conniston came of his own account. He thinks that maybe I know something about that plan—about those scraps of paper—and he is dead stuck on securing possession of them."

"What makes you think that?"

"Why, his line of questioning; and, say, I have led him a song and dance that will keep him guessing for fair."

"Told him lies, do you mean?"

"Take it as you like it. I don't mean that I have told him the truth."

"Tell me what you did say to him."

"Why?"

"Because I would like to know just what sort of a song and dance, as you call it, you did give him."

"Oh, well, I told him one thing that was true; I told him that I didn't and don't know a thing about the present hiding place of the four scraps of paper—and I don't. But I told him in such a way that he thought I was lying about it. He believes that I *do* know."

"I see."

"And, Carter——"

"Well?"

"Between you and me I'll tell you another thing."

"What is that?"

"Jake Conniston has got the 'golditis' as badly as we had it. He wants those plans more than anything else in the world. He don't care a snap of his

finger what becomes of Blanche or of me, if only he can get his claws onto those plans."

"How do you feel about the scraps of paper, Brigham?"

"Well, I'll tell you. When you came in here, a little while ago, I hadn't entirely recovered from my desire to have possession of them; but since I made a clean breast of this business to you, I have gotten rid of that idea. I think now that if I knew where they were hidden, I would tell you and would ask you to return them to the man who owns them."

"You mean Hallock?"

"Yes."

"Maybe you can help me to find them for him."

"I can't. I wish I could. If I could, I would."

"They belong to him, you know."

"Sure they do. We have robbed him of his best friend, and of the woman he loved. That is about enough. Those scraps of paper are his property, as the case stands now, and if I could help him to recover them, I'd do it, you bet!"

"Perhaps if you and Blanche were permitted to be together for a few minutes, here in the prison, she would tell you about them."

"Not her. You don't know her. I do. I am the very last person in the world she would tell her secret to."

"Do you think she will tell it to Jake Conniston?"

"No. I used to think she would tell me, before the end came; but I have changed my mind about that. All the same, you watch Jake."

"Why?"

"Oh, he is shrewd and smart. He will worm the information out of Blanche, if anybody can do it."

"Haven't you some idea as to where she might hide them?"

"On the level, I haven't."

"She didn't have much opportunity to secrete them very carefully."

"Oh, she had opportunity enough."

"I'm not so sure of that, Brigham. You put her on an express train at Coney Island, with Sally Orme, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What time did that train leave Coney Island?"

"Five-fifty."

"Then it would have been six-thirty when the express train arrived at the Manhattan end of the Brooklyn Bridge. So she would not have had time to go to her own rooms before going to the theatre. She must have gone straight to her dressing room at the theatre."

"I guess that's so. I hadn't thought of it before."

"And Sally Orme was with her all the time. They would have gone directly to the theatre together."

"Yes."

"You went there to see her between the second and third acts, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And when she left the theatre, Sally was with her again, and they went to Rector's with two men for supper. From Rector's, Ida Jones took Blanche to my house. So, you see, the only opportunity that Blanche had to hide those scraps of paper was between the moment when she arrived at the theatre and the time when she left it to go to Rector's."

"I guess that's so."

CHAPTER VIII.

CAMPING ON A TRAIL.

When Nick Carter arrived home after his interview with Brigham, he summoned Ida Jones to the study and he said to her:

"Ida, you did some mighty good work in the Connie Dorr case—case number six hundred and sixty two, in the books—so I am going to give you a stunt in the hunt for the scraps of paper."

"I am ready for it," she replied brightly. "I have been wondering what would be done about those scraps of paper. They are of considerable value."

"They are—and they are not," said Nick, somewhat vaguely. "They are of no value whatever to Hallock, save only that he desires to prevent them from falling into the hands of others. But he takes a sentimental view of the affair."

"Naturally."

"He is opposed to the idea that any person shall profit in the least by the murder of his sweetheart, and for that reason alone he wants to find those four scraps of paper, before they fall into the hands of any of the several parties now searching for them."

"Do you mean to say that several persons are searching for them?"

"Indeed I do. I have outlined them all to Hallock. He is amazed by the number of outfits, as he calls them, that are seeking the scraps of paper. He says there is gold enough there for a lot of very rich claims. I think that, later on, he will open up the whole country and let the miners rush it as they rushed

Cripple Creek years ago. But as the case stands just now, the secret is his, and his alone. He doesn't want any others to have it; at least, not until he is ready to give it out."

"So he has commissioned you to find the scraps of paper?"

"In effect, yes."

"Now, what am I to do in the matter?"

"This: When Brigham parted with the Gates woman at Coney Island, he put her aboard the five-fifty train for New York, via the elevated and the bridge. Sally Orme was with her."

"Yes."

"The two must have been obliged to go straight to the theatre, when they arrived in New York—but that is one thing which you must ascertain for certain."

"Very well."

"Whether the Gates woman parted with Sally Orme or not, between the bridge and the theatre, I do not know. They did arrive at the theatre together, in time to dress for their parts in the play."

"Yes."

"Brigham went to the theatre, forced his way to Miss Gates' dressing room, and threw the empty locket and clasp pin into her lap, between the second and third acts. At the end of the third act—at the close of the play—the Gates woman and Sally left the theatre together, in the company of the two men with whom they had supper at Rector's; and you went after them at Rector's and brought them here. Later, you were present when the Gates woman was searched, and I know how thorough you are in all such things."

"I was certainly thorough in that one. There was not a sign of the scraps of paper on the woman when she was searched."

"Well, if she didn't have them on her, when did she dispose of them?"

"I should suppose that she found a place to hide them at the theatre. In her dressing room, or somewhere there."

"That seems decidedly the most likely place of all. Now, Ida."

"Yes?"

"I commission you to search for the scraps of paper. I mean, directly for them. What you would call a main-strength search."

Ida nodded comprehendingly.

"Follow up every move that the woman could have made from the moment she parted with Brigham at the train at Coney Island to the time you practically arrested her, in front of Rector's, when you sent in to have her brought out to you, and from where you brought her to this house in the automobile. See how much of a report you can give to me on the subject by to-morrow evening."

"I will. Is that all?"

"Yes, for the present. I want to see Chick for a moment, now."

"He came in just a few minutes before you did. He is in his room, reading."

Nick mounted the stairs to the rooms of his first assistant, and as soon as he was seated went over in detail all that had happened since he and Hallock had been seated together in the moving-picture show at the island.

He repeated all of the interview with Brigham, and then his talk with Ida; and after that, he asked:

"Now, which of all the parties that we think might be interested in searching for the scraps of paper is, in your opinion, the most likely to get on the track of them?"

"The lawyer, Jake Conniston."

"Which one of the several parties I have named, in your opinion, is the most likely one to engage people to keep watch of Hallock?"

"Jake Conniston," was again the unhesitating reply.

"I quite agree with you. But give me your reasons for your opinion."

"Conniston has got money and time. He is a schemer. He worships money. He is in close touch with the woman. He realizes the importance of a gold mine that by reason of its secret existence will force two murders as this one did. He has reasoned the thing out from the standpoint of a lawyer."

"Just what do you mean by that remark?"

"I mean the same thing that is already quite clear to you."

"Well? I am asking for your opinions, just now. I'm not giving my own views. Your view of all the circumstances is what I desire."

"It isn't my view; it is Conniston's view."

"Well?"

"I don't really think that he cares much about the scraps of paper, if he can get the secret of the location of the mine out of Hallock—and it is easier to do that in the long run."

"I think it is."

"Hallock doesn't need the scraps of paper. He knows where the mine is located. He knows how to get to it without the aid of any plans."

"Yes."

"Just now, at the present moment, Hallock says that he will never go to the mine again; but you and I both know that some day he *will* go there—Conniston knows it, too."

"Sure. It is only human to do that; for Hallock to go there sooner or later."

"Certainly."

"Go on, Chick."

"It may be a year before Hallock starts for that mine. It may not be longer than six months, but to my mind, six weeks would be the outside limit of his remaining here; and when he does go away, he will point as straight for that mine as a bullet for a target at which it is aimed. Sentiment will draw him there, like a needle to a magnet. Conniston has reasoned that out, and he has engaged to have Hallock followed night and day, so that he won't get away without the knowledge of the lawyer."

"And——"

"And if, in the meantime, through the Gates woman, Conniston can learn anything about the four scraps of paper, so much the better. He can let go of the trail after Hallock, and use the plan; but if he cannot worm the information out of the woman, why, he is on the trail of Hallock all the time, and that will eventually lead him to his mark."

"All right, Chick. You have sized the thing up exactly as I did. Now, the lawyer is your meat for the rest of this affair."

"Very well."

"Use your own discretion. Approach him as you think best. I shall give you no directions. Only, don't let Jake Conniston beat you."

"I'll try not to do so. What will you do in the matter, yourself, Nick?"

"When I came into this room I hadn't an idea, more than you have expressed in your talk. But now that I have given you that end of the case, I have thought of another plan—and it is a novel one, too. I never tried it before."

"What is it, Nick?"

"I shall shadow my own client."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I am going to shadow Hallock."

"Without his knowledge, do you mean?"

"Certainly. The idea wouldn't be novel if I did it with his knowledge—and it wouldn't work, either."

"You will be obliged to wear a disguise."

"Of course. I shall use a good one, too. One that I won't have to change, if I can help it, but one that I can alter a little bit—just enough for my purposes—at will."

"I see the point. You think you can get onto Conniston's game in that way, and——"

"I can do more than that, Chick. I can protect Hallock."

"Oh, yes. I hadn't thought of that."

"Don't you know what would happen, if Jake Conniston should happen to find those four scraps of paper to-night or to-morrow?"

Chick nodded.

"The finding of them would sign Hallock's death warrant in about a jiffy. That is another reason why Conniston is having Hallock watched and followed. If the four papers are found by the lawyer, he not only will not need Hallock, but he will want the cowpuncher out of the way entirely."

"You're right."

"With the papers in his possession, and with Hallock dead, Conniston would be the only living person who could find the mine."

"And if the papers are not found, Hallock's usefulness ends the moment he has led his shadows to the mine. Conniston would have him put out of the way—then."

"Sure."

"There is another thing, Nick."

"Yes?"

"By keeping secret watch of Hallock, as you propose to do, you can always tell at once if Conniston has found the papers. The conduct of the men who are watching for him will tell you that."

"Of course. That was the first idea I had in taking up the matter in that way. Have you any idea, Chick, what particular breed of private detective Jake Conniston uses?"

"What agency he makes use of? No, I haven't. But a lot of his cases are divorce cases, so I suppose he takes that sort."

"Well, I won't be long in getting onto who it is. You have got the hardest job in the whole affair, Chick. Jake Conniston will be a difficult man to watch."

"Oh, I have already thought of a plan for doing that; it is one that will worry him some, too."

"What is it?"

"I shall go to him in the morning, disguised to represent you, and I shall tell him that I have camped on his trail. That's what it is. It will bother him, too, especially because I shall make him think that I am you."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCHEMING LAWYER.

We must follow Chick when he went to call upon the lawyer the following morning.

The office of Jacob Conniston was located on the top floor of one of the very tall buildings far downtown in the city. Chick opened the door and entered it at half-past nine in the morning, knowing that if Conniston happened to have an engagement in court that morning, he should be at the office preparing to go out in order to arrive at the court house at ten.

Those of us who have followed the Nick Carter histories for a long time will remember that it was a matter of not infrequent occurrence for Nick Carter and Chickering to exchange identities.

Long practice in that subterfuge had rendered them both very adept in assuming the character and personality of the other one.

Being of the same height and build—clothing made to measure for one of them perfectly fitted both—it was never a difficult matter for them to undertake.

The two do not resemble each other in features, save in a general way, and as two who are in as intimate relations as they are will grow to look somewhat alike for the very reason that they get into the habit of thinking alike. Our thoughts give expression to our features, and when we say that two persons look alike, we inevitably mean that their facial expression is alike.

Often it had happened that when Nick Carter found it desirable to be out of town, it was equally important that he should be supposed to be in the city; and on such occasions Chick played the part of Nick Carter while his chief went away.

So now it happened that when Chick entered the office of the lawyer, any person who knew Nick and Chick, both, and more or less intimately at that, would have supposed that it was Nick who entered the place, and would not have been led to change that opinion, even after a long talk with him.

And this lawyer, Jacob Conniston, knew Nick Carter only by sight, and with a mere bowing acquaintance. He did not know Chick at all.

Therefore, when Chick walked into the office, the lawyer turned from the window, through which he had been gazing, and perceiving his caller, stepped forward quickly and exclaimed, with every appearance of the utmost cordiality:

"Why, good morning, Mr. Carter! This is indeed a surprise, and a pleasant one. Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you," said Chick, perfectly imitating the voice of his chief. "Are you due at the court house this morning, Mr. Conniston?"

"Not until eleven. I have a case on which will be called at that time, but one of my office clerks is keeping watch for me. What can I do for you?"

"Hallock wants me to find the four scraps of paper for him," said Chick bluntly, speaking as Nick would have done under the circumstances.

"The four scraps of paper?" replied the lawyer, with that hesitating air of one who does not instantly sense the true meaning of an inquiry. And then he added, as if it was suddenly revealed to him: "Oh! I see. You mean the pieces of the plan to that lost mine, eh?"

"Yes. That was what I meant," dryly.

"Why should Mr. Hallock want them? He knows where the mine is located, doesn't he? He can find it without the assistance of those scraps of paper, can't he?"

"To be sure. But he doesn't want anybody else to get hold of them."

"No? Well, perhaps not. I suppose it is a very valuable property, Carter? Eh?"

"Hallock seems to think that there is about a thousand millions in sight, as a miner expresses it."

"My goodness! So much as that?"

"It is virgin gold. It is about as near to being the 'mother vein' as one can come, I suppose."

"Mighty interesting, isn't it?"

"Very."

"But why do you come to me about it, Mr. Carter?"

"Because the woman who has hidden the four scraps of paper is your client."

"To be sure."

"And because I know that you would talk with her about them, and that you would try to get the information out of her, if it is possible."

"H'm; well, I have asked her about that plan, but she won't say a word. She is as mum as an oyster; declares that she will carry the secret with her to the grave. Of course, if I had any information respecting the bits of paper, I would tell you about it."

"Oh—of course."

"And if I should happen to get on the trace of them, I would at once communicate with Mr. Hallock," smiled the lawyer.

"Oh—of—course. That would be just like you. I suppose that is why you are keeping such a careful watch on the movements of Hallock, eh?"

"I? Keeping a watch on Hallock? Sure, Mr. Carter, you are mistaken."

"I was down to the island yesterday," said Chick slowly, referring to Nick's visit to the place, "and Hallock told me that he was being dogged. We cornered the chap that was doing the dogging and discovered that he was a 'sparrow.' I suppose you know what that is, Conniston? You have enough detective work done for you to know."

"I have heard the term, but I don't see just why this particular matter is of interest to me."

"I'll tell you why it is of interest to you."

"Please do so."

"That is what I came here for; to play my cards face up on the table."

"Yes? It isn't your usual habit to do that, is it?" smiled the lawyer. He was not at all perturbed by the interview evidently.

"No; but in this case I thought it as well to do so."

"Yes. Well? Although you say the cards are face up, I confess that I don't see them."

"You are a very shrewd man, Conniston, and——"

"Thank you."

"Oh, I don't mind paying you a few compliments. You like them, I know. As I was saying, you are a shrewd man. You are a good lawyer. If I should undertake to shadow you, it wouldn't be very long before you dropped to the fact that it was being done."

"You are right about that, I think."

"Well, you see, it might make you uneasy to know just why you were being shadowed, and so I thought I'd do the square thing with you, and come and tell you about it."

"Tell me about what?"

"That you are being shadowed."

"By whom?"

"By me."

"In person?"

"Naturally, since I am here to tell you about it."

"Really, you do me much too great an honor. I should have thought that you would have delegated such a task to one of your helpers. Why do you consider me worth your valuable time, Mr. Carter?"

"Well, there are various reasons, chief among them being the fact that, by your frequent interviews with the woman who knows where the scraps of paper are hidden, you stand in a better position to find them than anybody else. And if you find them, I want to know it."

The lawyer threw back his head and uttered a hearty laugh; at least, it sounded sufficiently hearty. He was suddenly convinced of the very idea that Chick had wished to convey to him without putting it into words. The next remark of the lawyer proved that.

"You wouldn't be averse to discovering those scraps of paper yourself, would you, Carter?"

"No. Decidedly not."

"I am afraid that I cannot help you in that matter, however."

"But if you find them, I shall know about it."

"So that is why you are going to shadow me?"

"Yes."

"I am astonished that you should tell me about it."

"I have already explained why I do so."

"Because you have no desire to frighten me? Really, you assume too much, Carter. I am not one to be easily frightened. The mere fact that Nick Carter was or is shadowing me would not interfere with my peace of mind in the least, I assure you."

"I'm glad of that."

"How long a time have you been on my trail, Carter?"

"About ten minutes, I think; since I entered this office."

"Oh; then it has just begun?"

"Yes."

"Really, it is most kind of you to come directly to me and tell me about it. I scarcely know how to thank you for your thoughtfulness. May I ask you how you are going to do the shadowing?"

"Well," said Chick, lighting a cigar and offering one to Conniston, which he refused, "I do not think that you could exactly call it shadowing, since you are to be all the while cognizant of the condition of things. I thought the best way to do was to come straight to you and tell you about it, and then to go about with you, at all the places you visit, and——"

"Look here, Carter; if you think that I'm going to consider myself honored by your attentions to the extent of having you with me all the time, you are very much mistaken. And, besides, there is a law which will prevent you from annoying me. I shall get an injunction against you, if you make yourself a nuisance, and——"

"Oh, that won't be necessary."

"It may be so, and I will do it if it should be."

"I don't doubt it."

"Detectives are hardly in my line for daily associates, Carter," said the lawyer, with studied insolence.

"What the devil do you want to follow me for, anyhow?"

"I have told you."

"You want those scraps of paper yourself."

"At least I don't want you to get hold of them without my knowing about it—and I do not intend that you shall do so."

The lawyer thrust his hands deeply into his pockets and stared at Chick for a moment, in surprised, but moody, silence. Then:

"By thunder, Carter, I always supposed *you* were on the level! I did, for a fact."

"So I am," was the cool reply.

"This proposition of yours doesn't look much like it."

"What proposition? I was not aware that I had made one."

"Well, you have as good as made one—to the effect that if we work this thing out together you are willing to divvy on what comes out of it."

Chick shrugged his shoulders and remained silent.

"Isn't that the idea? Isn't that your proposition?" demanded the lawyer.

"I haven't made a proposition—as yet," said Chick.

"But you are quite willing to hear one from me. Is that it?"

"I have two ears to hear with," was the cool response.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAWYER MAKES A THREAT.

Jacob Conniston had been eager when he asked that last question, but even as he put it his face became clouded, and he withdrew into himself again, as a turtle might have drawn its head back beneath its shell.

He remembered in that instant with whom he was supposed to be dealing. Nick Carter was not a person to make a deal of that sort. Conniston suddenly decided that it was all merely an effort on the part of the detective to discover what he, as the Gates woman's lawyer, might know.

He assumed an air of injured innocence at once, and drew himself up haughtily.

"I am surprised at you, Carter," he said. "You ought to know me too well by reputation to suppose that I would enter into any such scheme as you propose. I won't hear of it. And another thing, if I do find out anything about those papers—which I have no idea that I will—you shall be the very last one to hear about it. The papers do not interest me."

"Of course—not."

"Oh, sneer if you want to. But please leave my office! I don't want you here."

As if Chick had been awaiting this very order, he arose at once and moved toward the door. The lawyer turned his back. Chick went outside and closed the door after him. Then he waited.

Twenty minutes later, Conniston came out of the office and Chick was still waiting. When Conniston descended in the elevator, Chick entered the same car.

When the lawyer hurried up Park Row and crossed it toward City Hall Park, Chick was only a few paces behind him. When the lawyer entered the court house, Chick followed.

They entered the courtroom almost together. One of the attendants, who thought he recognized Nick Carter in Chick, bowed to him. Chick waited in the background while the lawyer passed inside the rail and attended to some matters relative to his case.

An adjournment was asked for by the other side, and granted by the Court, and Conniston, after a short conversation with his clerk, left the courtroom. Chick followed a few paces behind him.

The lawyer took the subway uptown; Chick boarded the same car of one of the express trains. They changed to a local at Fourteenth street; they left the subway at Twenty-third street; walked to Broadway; took a downtown surface car, and rode to the City Hall again.

Conniston made straight for the building where his office was situated; Chick followed him into the elevator, and got out at the same floor. He waited outside the office when the lawyer entered it.

Shortly after one o'clock the lawyer came out of the office again, and crossed the park, and thence went down Park Place to Kalil's, for luncheon; Chick seated himself at the next table. The lawyer departed before his meal was half finished; so did Chick.

They returned to the office. Chick waited outside the door.

After about an hour a Central Office man appeared on the scene. He stepped from the elevator and at once approached Chick, but before he had taken three steps he began to grin.

"Hello, Nick!" he said, believing that he was addressing the detective in person. "I did not suppose it was you."

"Didn't suppose what?"

"Why, Conniston telephoned up to headquarters that a detective was bothering the life out of him; had

tried to blackmail him, and all that sort of rot. The inspector sent me down to find out who it was, and order him off the premises. But I guess you know what you are up to, eh?"

"I usually do, Mike."

"What's the game? Can I help you?"

"No. Thank you all the same. You might step inside the office and talk with Conniston."

"What shall I say to him?"

"Tell him, as if you were greatly surprised, that it is Carter who is outside. Tell him that you can't interfere with Carter—and all that. Tell him anything that happens to come to your mind."

"And then—what?"

"Get him to talking if you can. Listen to all that he has to say, and then find an opportunity to tell me about it; only don't do it here."

"Good! I'll do it."

The Central Office man entered the lawyer's office. He was gone almost half an hour, and when he came out he was chuckling. He glanced toward Chick with a broad grin on his face, but he walked straight to the elevator and descended by it.

Chick made a signal to him, and followed him down in the next car. They met at the foot of the shaft and stood there together talking, while Chick kept one eye on the descending cars. The Central Office man laughed heartily.

"Conniston says you're a blackmailer, Nick," he said. "Really, I ought to put you under arrest. He says you're after those scraps of paper which contain the plans of the lost mine."

"That's no dream. I am."

"For Hallock?"

"Yes."

"He only wants them because he doesn't want anybody else to get them, I suppose."

"Certainly."

"On the level, do you suppose that mine is worth as much as it is said to be?"

"I don't know any more about that mine than you do. It's the papers I want."

"A good many seem to want them; and, according to my way of thinking, Jake Conniston is not one of the least of the bunch."

"You bet your life he's not."

"He says you made a proposition with him to find the scraps of paper together, and then to divvy with the swag," said the Central Office man.

"That sounds like a proposition of Nick Carter's, doesn't it?" said Chick, with fine scorn.

"Oh, very much—in your eye. I told him there was no use trying to steer you off your job. I let on that you were very close to the commissioner, and that we wouldn't dare to interfere with you. He is chewing on that now. Said he'd telephone to the commissioner in person. He will, too."

"Much good it will do him."

"I told him that—but he didn't mind. You've got him guessing, all right."

After that Chick waited at the bottom of the elevator shaft until Conniston came down, at five o'clock.

It was evident that the lawyer had supposed when he did not find the detective outside his office door that the Central Office man had scared him away, for his face was elated when he appeared coming out of the elevator.

But he instantly caught sight of his annoyer, and his face fell again.

He went uptown, and Chick followed. They entered the café at the Hoffman House, and Chick stood at the bar almost beside the lawyer, while the latter drank a big glass of liquor. He swallowed it down at a gulp.

"Look here, Carter."

"Well?"

"Come over here to one of the tables and sit down for a moment."

"Very well." Chick followed him across the room, and they seated themselves at a vacant table.

"I have been thinking over what you said to me this morning at my office," said the lawyer.

"Yes?"

"I'll make terms with you."

"What sort of terms?"

"We'll work together in this thing—if you say so, and if we can agree."

"Well?"

"Oh, you're too noncommittal."

"I am waiting for you to say something."

"You help me to find those scraps of paper, and I'll help you. When they are found we will each own half. How does that strike you?"

"I'll think about it."

"Think about it! Great Scott! What do you want, anyhow?"

"I want *all* of it," was the cool reply.

"All of it?" demanded the lawyer, for a moment aghast. "What do you think I am, anyway?"

"I think you are a crooked lawyer, Conniston, if you want to know."

There was not the slightest change in the expression of Chick's face when he said that, nor was his manner different from what it had been since the beginning of their conversation. A flash of anger came into the face of the lawyer; then he laughed.

"Oh, I see," he said coolly. "You think that if I got my hands on the scraps of paper, I'd keep them; that I wouldn't give up."

"Yes. That is what I think."

"No; I'll play square with you."

"I'll see to it that you do so."

"Then you agree?"

"To what?"

"To what I have proposed? That we share alike in the business?"

"No. I want the papers. All of them."

"Say, look here, joking aside, what are you after, anyhow?"

"Those scraps of paper."

"Yes. I know. But suppose you got hold of them, what do you propose to do with them?"

"I shall do just as you said that you would do with them, when you lied to me about it, this morning."

"Look here, Carter——"

"I shall give them to Hallock—the owner of them."

"Oh, rats! Tell that to the marines."

"I'm telling it to you, Conniston."

"Then what in the world did you come to my office to see me for?"

"I told you that—this morning."

"Carter, I don't know what to make of you."

"No; I knew you did not."

"What is your game, anyhow?"

"Two things: To get those papers, and to prevent you from getting them."

"I begin to believe you. I do, really."

"You should have done that from the first."

"I'll tell you one thing, Carter."

"Well?"

"If you carry this thing too far—if you don't stop hounding me and following me wherever I go, I'll find a way to put you out of business."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FALSE PLANS.

A man entered the café and seated himself at another table. The lawyer glanced toward him, bowed, rose from his chair, and went to the other table with the newcomer. Chick recognized in the newcomer the superintendent of a certain private detective agency downtown which does not bear a very savory reputation. He judged at once that this superintendent's agency was the one in the employ of Conniston, and that a report had come from Coney Island by telephone, and that the meeting at the Hoffman House had been arranged so that a report could be made.

Chick did not care what that report might be. He knew that Nick was attending to matters down there in person. He would have been amused, indeed, could he have heard the first part of the conversation between the two men. For the sake of the humor of the situation, we will give part of it.

"Say, Conniston," said the divorce detective, as soon as the lawyer joined him, "Nick Carter is in this thing somewhere."

"I know that," replied Conniston grimly.

"He is down there at the island, now. The funny part of it is that he is shadowing Hallock."

"Oh, no, he isn't. You're mistaken. He is here in this room."

"Rats! It isn't half an hour ago that I received the telephone message. Nick Carter was in plain sight of my man when——"

"Do you know Nick Carter by sight?"

"Of course, I do."

"Look behind you. Tell me who that is at the next table?"

Chick, perceiving at that moment that he was the object, or rather the subject, of their conversation, calmly left his chair and crossed over to them.

"Hello, Griswold!" he said. "I'd rather like to hear what you chaps are discussing."

"This is a private conference," said Griswold haughtily, and drawing himself up while he puffed out his cheeks pompously.

"We don't want you. You're a nuisance!" said Conniston.

Chick calmly drew forward a chair and seated himself upon it. The lawyer and the private detective rose from their chairs as with one impulse. They went out upon Broadway, and Chick followed them. He kept close to them, too.

At the corner of Twenty-eighth street Conniston stopped and spoke to a big policeman who was standing there, but before he could half express himself Chick stepped forward and grasped the policeman's hand and exclaimed:

"Hello, Frank! Don't mind what these chaps say to you. They've been drinking."

Frank laughed. Conniston swore. Then he raised his fist and struck savagely at Chick's face.

Chick dodged the blow by a mere turn of his head. Then he shrugged his shoulders as big Frank caught the lawyer by the arm.

"Let him go, Frank," he said. "I told you he had been taking too much. Run along, Conniston, run along. I'll look out for you."

The lawyer choked back his rage as best he could. He turned to his companion, and said:

"You can leave me here. Call me up at my house, on the telephone, at eight; or come up there. I'll tell you what to do, then."

Without another word he turned through Twenty-eighth street, and entered the Everard café. Chick entered it also. They came out together—that is, not exactly together—after a time, and went to the station of the elevated road. Chick entered the same car with the lawyer, and sat down opposite him. He left the train at the same station and followed him to his door.

In the meantime, Nick Carter in person was busily engaged at Coney Island, but only a very small incident happened there that afternoon which is worthy of mention here.

Nick had assumed that the detectives engaged in the service of Conniston were of an inferior class, as indeed they were in one sense, but as to ability they proved quickly that they understood their business.

Watching from a distance, Nick was not long in determining the identity of the men who were dogging Hallock. There were three of them, where two should have been sufficient; but it was made plainer by the fact that the lawyer did not mean that Hallock should escape him when he was not expecting it.

A bit of good fortune aided Nick. He left the train at Ulmer Park, it being rather nearer to Hallock's house than Coney Island would have been, and as he stepped down from the platform he saw Hallock leave an upbound train and turn down Harway avenue toward his home. He also saw a man who was following the cowpuncher.

In adopting a disguise, Nick had sought only to array himself so that Hallock would not be apt to recognize him, and he knew that Hallock would not be looking for disguises, and was not of a penetrating mind in that respect, anyhow; so his disguise was very slight, indeed.

Nick strolled down Harway avenue after the man who was following Hallock, and was presently surprised to hear his own name mentioned from directly behind him. He turned to encounter one of Griswold's detectives.

"How are you, Mr. Carter?" the man said. "Taking the air at Ulmer Park?"

"Yes, a little. I was also watching that friend of yours who is following Hallock," replied the detective.

"You were with Hallock yesterday, to-day you are shadowing him," said the other man, smiling. "After the four scraps of paper, too, Carter?"

"Yes; but I am after them in a slightly different manner. I am keeping tabs on *your* outfit. I don't know your name, but you work for Griswold."

"Sure. My name is Peters."

"You don't suppose that Hallock knows where those four scraps of paper are hidden, do you, Peters?" asked Nick, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why, yes. We think he does. He has visited a certain place twice to-day, as if he was going to search for something, but was afraid to do so. He will go again before long. He knows where the papers are, all right."

"Why do you tell me this, Peters?" asked Nick, slightly puzzled.

"Oh, because I know that if you are on the trail, you will find it out anyhow, and because I thought that maybe we could come to an understanding. You are not above making an honest dollar, are you?"

"No; I think not."

"Well, if you are of a mind to work in with us, there is your chance."

"What do you mean?"

"This: Our employer hasn't an idea that Hallock knows where those papers are. I didn't have such an idea this morning. But I have seen enough since then to assure me that I will be able to put my fingers upon that plan before night. The man I'm working for doesn't even guess it. Our instructions are merely to keep Hallock in sight so that he won't light out for the mine without our knowing it. See?"

"Yes."

"Well, we—the other two who are with me and myself—aren't under any obligations to the man we're working for so far as the scraps of paper are concerned, and if I find them, they're mine. Findings are keepings, you know."

"Well?"

"I was merely going to say that we'd be glad to have you with us. We'd rather have you with us than against us, anyway. What do you say?"

"I'll think about it."

"You want to decide mighty sudden. There comes Hallock out of his house again, now."

"All right," said Nick. "You follow him. I'll see you later."

Nick turned back up the avenue toward Ulmer Park, and although the man who said his name was Peters called after him, Nick paid no attention. Hallock had come out of his house and was now walking rapidly toward Coney Island.

As Nick turned the corner, a train pulled in at the station, and believing that he knew pretty nearly where Hallock would go, at the island, Nick ran forward and caught the train, just as it was pulling out.

He arrived there, he knew, some time before it would be possible for Hallock to get so far on foot. He jumped from the train and ran into a place he knew, where he could make use of a private room for a moment. He issued from it very soon, but so changed in appearance that the man Peters would not again recognize him. Then he hurried toward the street through which Hallock must soon appear, followed by the detectives who were dogging his steps.

Nick Carter, gray-whiskered, gray-headed, with an impromptu hump stuck beneath his coat, a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, did not attract the attention of Hallock as the latter walked past him; nor, indeed, did Hallock so much as glance toward the detective, and, therefore, Nick had a fairly good opportunity to notice him particularly as he passed.

There was purpose in the cowpuncher's eyes. Nick detected that much at once, and then, as he waited for the trailers to pass along on the track of the cowpuncher, he suddenly smiled broadly to himself, exclaiming under his breath as he did so:

"By Jove! It's a wonder that I didn't think of that! But I'll give Hallock credit for it. He has fooled those chaps nicely. He has made them think that he knows where the scraps of paper are hidden, but he has made new plans—and false ones—in the meantime, and those are the ones that he intends shall fall into the possession of the men who are watching him."

The detective did not attempt to follow; he ran ahead. He thought he knew what Hallock's destination was, and he was right about it.

Nick arrived at Jethro's old place in advance of them all. He went around to the rear door and waited, for if he was correct in his surmise, that would be the way by which Hallock would now enter the place.

And he was right. Hallock soon appeared; not far behind him was one of the trailers.

Hallock paused a moment, appeared to look carefully around him, then he let himself into the place with a key—but when he closed the door it flew partly open again, as Hallock no doubt intended it should do. Two of the trailers followed him.

As soon as they had disappeared through the half-open doorway, Nick glided after them, and they were so eager in what they were doing that they saw nothing of the detective. They were watching Hallock.

Nick could see him, too, through the open doorway between the rear room and what had once been the consultation room. Hallock was bending over the table where once Jethro had told fortunes for his dupes. He pulled the cover from the top of it; he lifted the top, which was on hinges, apparently. Nick saw him reach his hand inside, and then withdraw it and close down the lid of the table instantly. He looked around as if he were frightened—and then he started forward and dashed away toward the other door, which would let him out of the building by the front entrance.

Nor did he start an instant too soon, for already the two men who had followed him there were creeping forward, and in another moment they would have attacked him, but as it was, not suspecting the move that Hallock had made, he eluded them before even they had a chance to begin the attack—and Nick Carter, with a strange smile on his face, turned away and retreated by the route he had come; and he hurried around the building to the front, arriving there in time to meet Hallock, who was in the act of walking rapidly away, smiling.

Nick had pulled off his disguise in the meantime. Now he confronted Hallock with outstretched hand.

"That was a dandy good play, Pike," he said to him. "How did you happen to think of it?"

"Oh, I thought it out," laughed Hallock. "If those fellows follow the plan I have left for them, it will take them to the middle of Death Valley in Arizona."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FOUR SCRAPS OF PAPER FOUND.

"Tell me how you got the idea," said the detective, as they turned together toward the street which would take them toward Harway avenue. It was then five

o'clock in the afternoon—about the time when Chick was busy with Conniston.

"Well, after what happened yesterday, it occurred to me that if those chaps were so mighty anxious to find plans which would lead them to the mine, it was a shame that I did not provide something that would satisfy them. I made the original plan—the one that Connie carried in four parts; there was no reason why I shouldn't make another one. So I did—after considerable labor."

"Enough like the original so that——"

"Just like the original, so far as the paper and the tracings are concerned, but not at all like it, in fact. It will take them to the middle of Death Valley, and if they don't die of thirst before they find that mine—well, I hope they will go there in search of it."

"You got out of the old place just in time, Pike. If you had waited another half minute, those fellows would have attacked you."

"Uh huh; and I would have been obliged to kill them instead of letting them thirst to death in Arizona," said Hallock coolly. "That is why I beat it. I thought they might take it into their heads to attempt something of the sort. I had figured on that. How did you happen to see it all?"

"Oh, I was on hand."

"So I see. Say, Nick, take me home with you for to-night. I'm getting lonesome down here."

"Just what I was about to suggest. Here is where we turn in for the train. Come on."

They stopped downtown in New York for their dinner, being late for that function at the home of the detective—and it was an inviolate rule never to wait for him if he were late—and so it was past eight o'clock in the evening when they entered the house together.

Ida was there, but Chick was not; but within a few moments Chick called up over the phone and announced that he had at last chased Conniston to his home.

"Let him stay there," said the detective over the telephone. "Come to the house. Hallock is here, and we will hold a consultation and see if we can't find something to guide us to the four scraps of paper. That is the quickest way of closing this case."

Ida overheard this remark, made by Nick, and she smiled knowingly.

When Nick put back the receiver and turned about, she said to him:

"You asked me to make a report to you to-night. I am ready."

"Have you found the four scraps of paper, Ida? Sit down, Hallock. Chick will be here very soon now. Well, Ida?"

"No. I have not found them. But I have found where they are not."

"Humph! That's easy."

"Not so dead easy as you think, Nick. Pardon me for using a trite expression, but your remark called for it."

"Well, make your report."

"Those papers were not concealed anywhere about the theatre, either in the dressing room or elsewhere. I am positive of that much. I have searched it thoroughly—if that were at all necessary, for I think that every person connected with that theatre has searched it upside down since this affair began."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"I have been to Rector's, too. There is not a spot there that the Gates woman was near in which she could have concealed those scraps of paper."

"I did not suppose it likely that there was one. What else?"

"I have had a long consultation with Sallie Orme."

"Well?"

"She was Blanche Gates' companion, you know."

"Yes."

"Sallie knows Blanche fairly well."

"She should, I think."

"Sally Orme says that Blanche would not have disposed of those scraps of paper elsewhere, save about her own person, unless she was obliged to do so."

"Well? What do you mean by the very significant tone in which you make that remark?"

"I mean that she was not *obliged* to dispose of those papers anywhere—*until I went to Rector's after her, at your command.*"

"Good! That is an idea."

"So I have come to the conclusion that Blanche Gates had those four scraps of paper in her possession when she came out of Rector's in response to my message to her."

"Ida, I rather think you have hit the nail on the head there."

"Well, if she did have them with her then, and did not have them with her when she was so thoroughly searched a little later—and I was not away from her for a moment until she *was* thoroughly searched—where did she put them?"

"You answer the question. You have thought it all out."

"Yes, I have. But I am afraid of my own conclusions."

"Why so?"

"Because there is only one place left for us to search where she could possibly have had time to attempt to conceal the papers."

"In the automobile."

"Yes. I went after her, with Danny, in your car. I brought her away from Rector's in that car. I sat beside her, not in front of her. She could have tucked those papers between the cushions during the ride between Rector's and this house."

"Ida, I believe you are right. It was not until then that she thought herself in any danger of arrest."

"No."

"She had no opportunity before that. She would not wish to part with them, unless she was forced to do so, until she could put them in a place carefully selected, and I have no doubt that she had such a place in mind all the time."

"That is what Sally Orme says about it."

"But when you arrested her——"

"I did not arrest her—really you know."

"Oh, well, it was the same thing. When you arrested her, when you compelled her to get into the automobile and she knew she was being taken to Nick Carter's house, she was smart enough to realize that she was in trouble and that she would be searched. Her first thought would naturally be to rid herself of the four scraps of paper, and to put them somewhere, if possible, where she could find them again a little later if all went well."

"Yes. I think so. That is what I thought."

"Have you searched the automobile?"

"Certainly not. I waited for you."

"Use the telephone, Ida, and have Danny bring the car around at once. We will settle this thing without any more delay."

While Ida was engaged at the telephone, Chick entered the house, and amid much smiling on the part of Nick and Pike Hallock, related all that had happened that day in his pursuit of the tricky lawyer.

"We will let Jake Conniston alone after this," said Nick. "I think he will go to his own doom if those chaps down at the island tell him about the four scraps of paper *they* have discovered. Hallock made a fake set of plans. He pretended to go after them, and then to be frightened off before he could secure them. Some of Conniston's detectives were on the watch, and I suspect that they didn't lose much time in searching that old table after Hallock came away. It's a 'skinch,' Chick."

"I only hope they will go to Death Valley in search of the mine," said Hallock grimly.

"Danny is on the way here," said Ida, turning toward them.

"Good!" said the detective. "We will be at the door. Ida, you shall do the searching. If the four scraps of paper are there, yours shall be the honor of finding them, for you thought out the possible solution of the problem. Really, I'm amazed that we did not all think of it the very first thing. It is so simple. But, then, it is the simple things in this business that are often the most puzzling."

"And that's no dream," said Chick.

The tooting of the automobile horn at the door announced that Danny had arrived, and they all left the house together to go to it.

Ida at once sprang into the tonneau—and for a moment she placed herself in the seat that had been occupied by Blanche Gates that night when the woman was brought from Rector's in the car by Ida and Danny.

"When she came out of Rector's she held her handbag in her hand—so," said Ida. "I noticed that she did not rest it upon her lap, but put it down beside her. I remember that now. She could easily have put her hand inside of it and extracted the four scraps of paper, and, having done that, she would have crowded them into the first available space. That would have been—*here*."

Ida thrust the fingers of her right hand between the cushion at the back and the one that formed the seat. Then she uttered a little cry of elation.

She raised her right hand and held it up to view.

"There they are," she said with some excitement. "There are the four scraps of paper."

Pike Hallock reached out and took them from her.

He glanced at them, and then said:

"These are the four scraps of paper that Connie Dorr had with her when she was killed. It is well, Miss Jones, I am your eternal debtor."

Then, calmly, he took a match from one of his pockets, lighted it, and touched the flame to the scraps of thin paper.

Nick Carter, Chick, and Ida looked on while they were burned to a crisp, and afterward were crushed in Hallock's palm.

THE END.

The next number (664) will contain "The Secret of the Mine; or, Nick Carter's Coney Island Mystery."

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THE DETECTIVE'S BEST JOB.

I was visiting my friend, Robert Normill, who had been a college chum of mine, and had gained great notoriety as a detective. He was a young man, but no one was more shrewd in his profession. It was the afternoon of my arrival. Bob would not allow me to go into the house until we had had a chat together. We were enjoying ourselves under an old elm, whose branches gave ample and cool shade. We were enjoying ourselves hugely. Bob, at my earnest solicitation, was telling me how he became a detective, when I interrupted him by asking:

"I say, Bob, tell me about the best job you ever did?"

"Very well, Doc, light a fresh cigar and I will accommodate you."

"All right; go ahead."

"Well, it was about a year ago. I was lounging right under this old tree, which is a favorite thinking place of mine. I was wondering how I was ever going to get a clue to the Barnes' Bank robbery. I was employed in that case, and every move I had made seemed destined to be a failure. Never having failed in a case that I had ever had, and the Barnes case being one in which, if I should be successful, my reward would be great, I was more anxious than usual to succeed. While sitting here thinking upon the matter I was disturbed by hearing some one weeping, and from the sound I knew it was a woman. I rose up and looked in the direction from which the sound came, and was surprised to see a beautiful young woman, plainly dressed, being dragged along by a constable. Something prompted me to look into the matter. I stepped down to the walk, and accosted the officer:

"'What have you got there, Brown?'

"'A wagrant, Mr. Normill. She are a bad one, no mistake.'

"'She does not look much like a vagrant, Brown; she looks more like a respectable young lady,' I replied.

"'Oh, sir, I am! I want work, and when I asked for it some one complained against me, and had me arrested. Please help me, sir—please do!' sobbed the young lady, wringing her hands in her sorrow.

"'Brown,' said I, 'let me talk with her.'

"The constable consented, giving me a knowing wink, as much as to say, 'Don't let her fool you; she is a bad one.'

"I took the lady one side, and questioned her. The result, in short, was as follows: Her name was Mary Hammond. She had been living with Mr. Barnes, of the firm of Barnes & Co., bankers, teaching his daughter music and assisting in the household duties. Barnes' son, Henry, had proposed marriage to her, and was promptly refused. He became angered. This was just after the bank robbery, and also the robbery of the safe in Barnes' house. His mother's jewelry had been stolen. Young Barnes accused her of the theft, and brought forth as evidence against her some of the jewelry, which he claimed was found in her room. She was immediately discharged. Then Henry Barnes told her that if she would marry him he would prove that she was innocent. In less than an hour afterward, while she was seeking employment, she was arrested as a vagrant; who made the complaint against her she did not know.

"I made up my mind that I had got a clue at last. I turned to the constable, and said:

"'Brown, I want you to turn this lady over to me; I will see that she is safely cared for.'

"'How will a chap like me get my fees?'

"'I will pay them.' And I immediately did so.

"Then I took the young lady into the house, introduced her to mother, and explained the matter. I requested mother to keep the young lady quiet and out of sight. I had sealed the lips of the constable by a little coin. My next move was to follow the clue. That was the hardest job of all. I made up my mind in some way to meet young Barnes under a disguise. I had been watching him closely, as well as all other employees and members of the banking firm. I knew that men of his make-up were naturally superstitious. I hit upon this plan: I wrote him a letter, and can recollect the contents of that letter, word for word. It was this:

"'MR. HENRY BARNES: Meet me at my rooms, 232 Lincoln Block, Friday evening, at eight o'clock, sharp. I have made discoveries in my reading of the stars that may benefit you. MADAM DUMONT, Astrologer.'

"Friday evening I was at three thirty-two, having previously rented the rooms for a week. You would not have known me. Face shaved clean and powdered white, dressed in the garb of an old-fashioned lady, I was positive that he would not know that Madam Dumont was none other than Robert Normill.

"He arrived promptly.

"'Is this Madam Dumont?' he said.

"'It is,' I replied.

"'What have you to reveal?' he anxiously asked.

"'You are not alone,' I asserted.

"'Sure I am,' he replied.

"'That is a lie!' said a voice directly behind him.

"He turned, but there was no person to be seen.

"'Did you hear that?' he asked.

"'Hear what?'

"'That voice. Some one spoke.'

"'You must be mistaken. Can't you see that we are the sole occupants of the room?'

"'Then what can it be?' said he, looking somewhat alarmed.

"The voice again answered.

"'I am the spirit of Mary Hammond, who by your falsehoods you drove from your father's door to die of starvation on the street. Confess thy crime, Henry Barnes.'

"He was upon his knees shaking like an aspen. He had wholly forgotten my presence. I knew that he was guilty of something, but of what remained for the 'spirit' of Mary Hammond to find out.

"'Confess thy crime, or thou shalt not depart from this place except with a brand upon you which will say to the outside world, this man murdered Mary Hammond by charging her with committing a crime of which she is innocent. Confess, confess, or meet a fate worse than death.'

"The poor fool was hugging the floor, crying, moaning, and cringing like the miserable coward that he was.

"Again the solemn and unseen voice spoke:

"'Wilt thou confess, or shall the spirits of the air inflict the hated brand? Wilt thou confess? Thou craven, answer.'

"His answer was feeble.

"'Yes, forgive me, I will confess.'

"'Who robbed the bank?' asked the unseen voice.

"'I did.'

"'Who stole thy mother's jewels?'

"'I did,' gasped the coward.

"'Why didst thou accuse one who was so innocent as Mary Hammond?'

"'I wished to marry her, and thought——'

"'Enough, craven. You see yon door is open. Go and confess to the world as thou hast confessed to me, or I again will visit thee.'

"The coward rose, staggered to the door, and found himself in the charge of a policeman. I also had Constable Brown there concealed where he could hear the whole conversation, and it taught him this lesson: That officers should not consider that an arrest is prima-facie evidence of guilt. Well, so much for ventriloquism. You know that I practiced it when we were at school together. I will not bother you by repeating the confession that the cowardly fellow made to his father more than to say that he was guilty. His father hushed the matter up by using lots of hush money, and by sending his miserable son to Europe. He paid me well. Now, if you will come with the house I will introduce you to one of the best women in the city."

"Who is that, Bob?" I asked.

"My wife, formerly Mary Hammond."

"Because you got well paid, and got a good wife, you call it the best job that you ever did."

"Certainly, Doc."

"I think you have got a right to that opinion," I replied. And I will say right here that I found that Mrs. Normill did in no way belie my friend's assertion.

A CLEVER RUSE.

Some time ago, the northern part of New York State was flooded with counterfeit coin. It was so well manufactured that it passed readily. The evil at last became so great that the government authorities requested a skillful detective might be sent to ferret out the nest of coiners. I was fixed upon to perform the duty.

I had nothing to guide me. The fact, however, that Buffalo was the city where the counterfeit coin was most abundant, led me to suspect that the manufactory might be somewhere within its limits. It was, therefore, to this city that I at first proceeded. I spent five weeks in Buffalo, but without gaining the slightest clue to the counterfeiters.

I began to grow discouraged, and really thought I should be obliged to return home without having achieved any result. One day I received a letter from my wife, requesting that I would send her some money, as she was out of funds. I went into a bank, and asked for a draft, at the same time handing a sum of money to pay for it, in which there were several half dollars. The clerk pushed three of the half dollars back to me.

"Counterfeit," said he.

"What?" said I; "do you mean to tell me those half dollars are counterfeit?"

"I do."

"Are you certain?"

"Perfectly certain. They are remarkably well executed, but they are deficient in weight. See for yourself."

And he placed one of them in the scales against a genuine half dollar on the other side. The latter weighed down the former.

"That is the best executed counterfeit coin I ever saw in my life!" I exclaimed, examining them very closely. "I am the counterfeit money in circulation here of the same character as this?"

"Oh, dear, no!" replied the clerk. "It is not nearly so well done. These are the work of Ned Willett, the famous New York counterfeiter. I know them well, for I have handled a great deal of it in my time. Here is some of the money that is in circulation here," he added, taking several half dollars from a drawer. "You see the milling is not nearly as perfect as Ned Willett's, although it is pretty well done, too."

I compared the two together, and found that he was right. I supplied the place of the three counterfeit half dollars with good coin, and returned the former to my pocket again.

A few days after this I received information which caused me to take a journey to a village situated about thirty miles from Buffalo. I arrived there at night, and took up my quarters at the only tavern in the place. It was a wretched dwelling, and kept by an old man and woman, the surliest couple, I think, it has ever been my lot to meet. In answer to my inquiry as to whether I could have lodging there for the night, I noticed that the host gave a peculiar look at his wife, and after some whispering, I was informed, in the most ungracious manner possible, that I could have a bed.

The chamber was small in size, and was certainly well ventilated, for I could see the stars peeping through the roof. The bed was simply a bag of straw thrown into one corner of the room, without covering of any kind.

I stood for more than an hour gazing out of the opening which served for a window. Before me was spread an immense wood, the limits of which I could not see. The tavern in which I had taken up my abode seemed to be isolated from all other buildings, and save the hum of the beetle, as it winged its droning flight, not a sound reached my ears. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and so bright that I could see to read the smallest print.

At last I began to grow weary, and throwing myself on my pallet, I was soon plunged into a deep slumber. How long I slept I know not; but I was awakened by a dull sound, which resembled some one hammering in the distance. I suppose it was the peculiarity of the sound which awoke me, for it was by no means loud, but conveyed to me the idea of some one striking iron with a muffled hammer. I rose up from my bed and went to the window; the moon was low in the western horizon, by which fact I knew that it must be near morning.

I put on my boots, the only article of attire I had discarded, and cautiously opening the door of my chamber, noiselessly descended the rickety staircase. A few steps brought me into the lower apartment, which I found entirely deserted. I crept quietly to the door, and, unfastening it, without making the slightest noise, was soon in the moonlight.

Not a soul was visible, but the sound still continued, and grew more distinct as I approached the place from which it proceeded. At last I found myself before a long, low building, through the crevices of which I could perceive a lurid glare issuing. I stooped down and peered through the keyhole, and, to my extreme surprise, I saw half a dozen strong-looking men with their coats off, and sleeves turned up, performing a variety of strange occupations. Some were working at a forge, others were superintending the casting of moulds, and some were engaged in the process of milling coin. In a moment the whole truth burst upon me. Here was the gang of counterfeiters I was in search of, and the landlord and his wife evidently belonged to the same band, for in one corner I perceived them employed—the man polishing off some half-dollar pieces, just turned from the moulds, while the woman was packing the finished coin into rolls.

I had seen enough, and was about to return to my apartment again, when suddenly I felt a heavy hand placed on my shoulder, and turning my head round, to my horror, found myself in the grasp of as ill-looking a scoundrel as ever escaped the gallows.

"What are you doing here, my good fellow?" he exclaimed, in a gruff voice, giving me a shake.

"Taking a stroll by moonlight," I replied, endeavoring to maintain my presence of mind.

"Well, perhaps you'll just take a stroll in here, will you?" returned the ruffian, pushing open the door and dragging me in after him.

All the inmates of the barn immediately stopped work, and rushed toward us when they saw me.

"Why, what's this?" they exclaimed.

"A loafer I found peeping outside," said the man who had captured me.

"He's a traveler that came here to-night and asked for lodgings; the last time I saw him he was safe in bed," said the landlord.

The men withdrew to a corner of the barn, leaving one to keep guard over me. I soon saw they were in earnest consultation, and were evidently debating some important question. The man keeping guard over me said nothing, but scowled fiercely. At last the discussion seemed to be settled, for the blackest and dirtiest of the crowd came forward, and without any introduction, exclaimed:

"Look here—you must die!"

I did not move a muscle nor utter a word.

"You have found out our secret, and dead men tell no tales."

I was still silent.

"We give you ten minutes to say your prayers, and also allow you the privilege of saying whether you will be hanged or shot."

Suddenly an idea struck me. I remembered something that might save my life. I burst into a violent fit of laughter, in fact, it was hysterical, but they did not know that. They looked from one to the other in the greatest amazement.

"Well, he takes it mighty cool, anyhow," said one.

"I suppose he don't think we are in earnest," said another.

"Come, now, you had better say your prayers," said the man who had first spoken. "Time flies."

My only reply was a fit of laughter more violent than the first.

"The man's mad!" they exclaimed.

"Or drunk!" said some.

"Well, boys," I cried, speaking for the first time, "this is the best joke I ever se'ed. What, hang a pal?"

"A pal—you a pal?"

"I ain't nothing else," was my elegant reply.

"What's your name?"

"Did you ever hear of Ned Willett?" I asked.

"You may be certain of that. Ain't he at the head of our profession?"

"Well, then, I'm Ned Willett!"

"You Ned Willett?" they all exclaimed.

"You may bet your life on that," I returned, swaggering up to the corner where I had seen the old woman counting and packing the counterfeit half dollars.

Fortune favored me. None of the men present had ever seen Ned Willett, although his reputation was well known to them, and my swaggering, insolent manner had somewhat thrown them off their guard, yet I could plainly see that all their doubts were not removed.

"And you call these things well done, do you?" I asked, taking up a roll of the money. "Well, all I can say is, that if you can't do better than this, you had better shut up shop—that's all."

"Can you show us anything better?" asked one of the men.

"I rayther think I can. If I couldn't I'd go and hang myself."

"Let's see it!" they all cried.

This was my last coup, and one on which I knew my life depended.

"Lookee here, gentlemen," I exclaimed, taking one of the counterfeit half dollars from my pocket, which had been rejected at the bank, "here is my last job; what do you think of it?"

It was passed from hand to hand, some saying it was no counterfeit at all, others saying that it was.

"How will you prove that it is a counterfeit?" asked one of the men.

"By weighing it with a genuine one," I replied.

This plan was immediately adopted, and its character proved.

"Perhaps he got this by accident," I heard one of the men whisper to another.

"Try these," said I, taking the other two from my pocket.

All their doubts now vanished.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed some.

"Splendid!" said others.

When they examined them to their satisfaction, they all cordially shook me by the hand, every particle of doubt having vanished from their minds. I carried out my part well. Some questions were occasionally asked me, involving some of the technicalities of the business; these, however, I avoided, by saying that I was on a journey of pleasure, and would much rather drink a glass of whisky than answer questions.

The whisky was produced, and we made a night of it, and it was not until morning had dawned that we separated.

The next day I returned to Buffalo, and brought down the necessary assistance, and captured the whole gang of counterfeiters in the very act.

The gang was broken up forever, and most of them were condemned to serve a term of years at Sing Sing.

WITH THE WOLVES BELOW HIM.

The first settlements in what is now the town of Salem, Maine, were begun in 1815. The dangers were many, says a son of one of the first settlers, and owing to the number of wolves it was absolutely unsafe for children, or even grown people, to go far from their homes.

When Elbridge Blake was a small boy he had a narrow escape from a tragic death. He and his brother Daniel were sent for the cows one night, and were told to bring home some "brown stuff"—dried branches—with them.

Elbridge looked after the brush, while his brother drove the cows home. It was perhaps half a mile from their home, down toward the Kingfield Road, all woods, except small clearings where the cows pastured. Elbridge, emerging from the thicket with his "brown stuff," found himself confronted by a pack of wolves. He was near a small, slender tree, and as rapidly as possible he climbed it, until he felt that it was bending. He knew that wolves cannot climb; but if the branch which he was grasping with both hands should bend low or break, he would be at their mercy.

His screams and shouts were finally heard by Mr. Briggs, who lived about a quarter of a mile distant.

Mr. Briggs, recognizing it as the voice of a child, and suspecting the cause, ran speedily up to Mr. Blake's, and breathlessly inquired if all their children, nine in number, were at home. The answer was that they were all there but Elbridge.

"Faith, then," said Mr. Briggs, "the wolves have got him."

The older members of the family and a number of workmen employed on the brick walls of a new house rushed to the rescue.

Elbridge heard the noise in the distance of the rescuing party, and took courage. "The wolves," he says, "appeared to look at each other, and to wonder what turn they had better take."

The yells of the rescuers had the desired effect. At sight of the men, the wolves scattered and fled in all directions toward the woods, and the small boy slid down from his lofty perch, unhurt, but well-nigh scared out of his wits.

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